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Desecrate:
An Original Feature-Length Screenplay

By

Justin Zorn

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for
Honors in the Department of English

Union College

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ABSTRACT

ZORN, JUSTIN. *Desecrate*. Department of English, March 2017.

ADVISORS: Professor Andrew Burkett, Professor Jim de Sève.

The basis of this creative project was to construct a feature-length, three-act screenplay in the mold of both the American Western genre and the modern road epic. The “road” genre, a staple of American cinema, is form of story in which one or two characters are confronted by situations that put them on journeys of Odysseus-like proportions during which they must overcome some fundamental issues in their respective lives.

Following the examples of mainstream road epics such as Steven Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and the Cohen brothers *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), my screenplay incorporates the same three-act structure depicting an historical setting in which the moral and circumstantial conflicts of the characters are explored. These different issues all revolve around one fundamental question, which is reinforced by the journey narrative. Set at the start of the Second Industrial Revolution and unfolding in the wake of the American Civil War, my road epic’s fundamental question concerns the era’s divide between industrial progress and lost heritage. This epic follows two protagonists – the ex-Confederate soldier, John Cutler, and his young Native American guide, Apenimon – both of whom are confronted by the nation’s transitional era by way of their fading identities. The impending extinction of their respective heritages as frontier farmer and Native American and their different ways of life pairs the two men on a grave and morally ambiguous phrenological quest across the American West, during which the two often find themselves at odds for ethical reasons as they seek to uncover the buried skulls of Native American tribes. Yet, despite their ostensibly

antithetical relationship, John and Apenimon are faced with the same fundamental question concerning their preservation of home as they travel across a war-torn America quickly working to restore itself. The heart of the script raises the question of whether it is better to adapt or risk one's ethical integrity to cling to the past. This question is reinforced through the hard-luck frontier towns through which these two characters pass as well as the encounters they have with different members of a rapidly-changing postwar American society. Through their interactions with both the land and its share of absurd, quasi-mythological characters, John and Apenimon both form their own conclusions about the necessity of change as well as the morality of their journey. In this way, the road challenges them in equal parts physically, emotionally, and ideologically. Although, the long journey promises to bring the two protagonists together, the past issues that initially drove each man from his respective home leads to his own interpretation of the journey's events, the morality of the phrenological expedition, and the quest's noted fundamental question. Both John and Apenimon know that their antithetical journeys will bring them to a moment in which each will finally have to decide for himself what is most important: progress or heritage.

Introduction

It is rather a perilous business to procure Indians' skulls . . . I don't rejoice in the prospects of death of the poor creatures certainly but then you know it will be very convenient for my purposes . . . (Bieder 10)

Even today, my stomach churns when I read the virulently racist words of a paid gravedigger, as captured in historian Robert E. Bieder's "A Brief Historical Survey of the Expropriation of American Indian Remains." There is a confidence in his account that demonstrates a warped belief that the desecration of a Native American tribe's most sacred grounds is a virtuous endeavor. When I read Bieder's survey three years ago, my only understanding of American Indian burial grounds came from their campy depictions in America film. Movies such as *Pet Sematary* (1989) and *The Amityville Horror* franchise have represented this cinematic trope in which the unknowing and often Caucasian characters somehow disturb the spirits of buried American Indians and in turn inspire a three-act long supernatural revenge plot. Yet, as cinematic tropes often do, films such as these showed me how audiences might learn that the truth concerning violated Native American graves was much scarier than fiction. Never had I read such heinous and morally bankrupt acts as when I studied our nation's overwhelmingly extensive history of desecrating a culture's most sacred grounds. Hundreds of people traveled cross-country to collect and return skulls by the thousands (Bieder 1). With each account my mind flooded with more and more questions concerning the morality, the reasoning and the people behind such journeys. What kind of person would take up this endeavor to desecrate the graves of Native Americans? What could possibly be the impetus for such a clearly depraved journey? And perhaps most important, how could anyone possibly rationalize such a quest? Ultimately, searching for answers to these questions sent me on

a three-year journey through a dark era of American history, which served as the inspiration of a feature-length American Western road epic. This research directed me to the formation of a conflicted protagonist, the ex-Confederate soldier, John Cutler. Yet, it is John's emotional journey, as he seeks to do the unthinkable with his grave-robbing, that reflects my own struggles to answer these questions of circumstance and morality.

To understand the motivations of John's character, I had to understand his circumstances and the desperation that was born out of his environment. Post-Civil War America was a time of great tension. The American Civil War was unequivocally the bloodiest war in the nation's history. Yet despite the nation's renewed unification after the war, the wounds of the divided nation were not addressed as the country moved towards industry and progress at the onset of the Second Industrial Revolution. The construction of the transcontinental railroad was a symbol of the nation's industrial might and method of reunification; however, while government officials worked to rapidly rebuild and reunite the country, those who had lost the most, primarily poor white Southern farmers, enjoyed few benefits and were made to feel forgotten. Bieder notes the benefits and fallbacks of this paradigm when he writes that "[c]hanges brought about by the industrial revolution brought even greater progress and further disruption in American society" (16). Desperate times were ahead as the infrastructure that was destroyed in the South during the years of fighting was not mended during this time of progress and many white southerners were left "bewildered by the rapid pace of progress" (Bieder 16). Unfortunately, this desperation turned to nostalgia for Southern preeminence. What emerged were newfound ideas of white supremacy and a disturbing nostalgia for an age in which African Americans and, indeed, all non-Caucasians were

considered subservient.

Not coincidentally, during this time, the conception of “Social Darwinism,” or the idea that the social order is an organic product of natural selection and genetic superiority, reached prominence in American society. The proponents of Social Darwinism found great appeal with the many white Southerners, and followers of the “lost preeminence” movement, who had felt left behind during this age of progress. Bieder affirms this prejudiced nostalgia by tying this prevailing attitude to the nation’s “social, economic and racial conditions” (3). Not unlike our nation’s present political situation in which a disgruntled and “forgotten” white majority radically reaffirmed their influence by electing a man with racially inflammatory rhetoric, the desperation that was born from an ostensibly forgotten “whiteness” manifested itself in a great nostalgia and a warped rationale. For the desperate white Southerners of 1870, this desperation rendered a belief in Social Darwinism and, more disturbingly, a newfound appeal in the science of phrenology, a bunk form of racist nineteenth-century “science,” which, through the analysis of the human skull, “proved” Caucasian genetic superiority.

At its core, phrenology is the study of the shape and size of a human skull as an indication of a person’s mental faculties. Yet, during this era of renewed racial bigotry, phrenology became the science of “proving” Caucasian racial ascendancy. The “scientific” evidence and motivation is further elaborated on in the account in Bieder’s piece:

The exact coincidence betwixt the development of these skulls and the character of this people [Indians] would lead us to suppose that they represent a national shape. The general size is greatly inferior to that of the average European head; indicating inferiority in natural mental power. (11)

It is clear from this passage that there was a genuine belief in this inferiority of non-white races as well as the idea that such a racist ideology could be “evidenced” through pseudo-medicine and science. Today, with nearly two-hundred years of evolving science and national racism as perspective, these attitudes are nothing short of deranged of course. Yet, as Bieder notes, phrenology and Social Darwinism were supported by former slave-owners and frontier entrepreneurs, who would clearly benefit from a theory that supported non-white inferiority (2). And, as Bieder’s text attests, these deranged hypotheses were the driving force behind the majority of these American Indian grave excavations.

The context of these excavations helped explain some of John’s motivation for his quest. More importantly, it explains his desperation at the start of the story. However, his character could not be explained entirely by desperation, nor could he be explained entirely by old-fashioned racism. What evolves for John is the realization that his character endeavors to embark on two separate emotional journeys—the journey before the plot during which his emotional arc is a decline as he falls far enough to lose his moral integrity and place himself on this treacherous grave-desecrating course; and his journey during his travels across war-torn America, alongside his young Native American guide, Apenimon. Ironically, it is this last journey, the one that we witness, that is the reformation of his morality and his humanity. As he rides through this historical—yet often unfamiliar—landscape he is forced to confront not only the grave nature of his job but also the path that led him away from his humanity and down this bleak and dreary road.

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Finally, to my parents and sister, who have given me endless emotional support and who have taught me the most important lesson I will ever learn, the lesson of the mountain, one step at a time, *pole pole*.

"DESECRATE"

Written by

Justin Zorn

FADE IN:

EXT. MIDWESTERN CITY - NIGHT

Night-time stars reflect harshly off railroad steel lines.

SUPERIMPOSE: Bendwood, Indiana, 1870

It is a young river city burgeoning on industrial maturity. A titanic steel mill squats along the river beside a little hut of a train station. A long set of parallel train tracks traces the river all the way into the endless horizon.

EXT. SALOON - CONTINUOUS

It is softly lit and humming with the rambles of townspeople and hearty rail-workers drinking after a long day's work.

A tired voice strains beneath the bustle.

VOICE (V.O.)
Season of mists and mellow-
fruitfulness...

There's a pause as the hum of the crowd grows louder.

VOICE (V.O.)
Close bosom friend of the maturin'
sun.

The buzz grows louder with a man's shout and a bottle's crash. The voice labors.

VOICE (V.O.)
Conspiring with him...
to load and bless....

More glass shatters. There's a thud of a drunk body hitting the floor. The voice fights desperately not to drown against the wave of noise.

VOICE (V.O.)
With fruit the vines that round-
With-with-

The bar door swings open and a man flies out. He tumbles feebly into a ditch.

A set of weary eyes poke through his swollen face. They look dully up at the vibrant night sky. He is old in appearance and worn at heart, but he is younger than he seems. This is JOHN CUTLER.

He drunkenly resumes battle with the words.

JOHN

W-W-With...

His split lip quivers. He is either too drunk to win the battle or unaware that he has already lost the war.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Where are the songs of spring?

Heavy boots spill dirt into John's pit. He looks up to find a hulking bowler-hat-wearing brute looking down at him, WHITLEY.

WHITLEY

How come everywhere you go you
leave a stain of shit?

John drunkenly stares up at the hulk of a man.

WHITLEY (CONT'D)

I want my money Friday, John. If
Whitley doesn't get his money by
Friday, you'll be buried in that
hole you've just pissed in.

John doesn't respond.

WHITLEY (CONT'D)

Look at it this way. When the
railroad's finished you'll be the
first to know.

Suddenly, something makes John's sallow face go white. It's not Whitley. Silhouetted in the moonlight, by Whitley's side, stands a young man, dressed in Confederate greys. John can't believe his eyes.

JOHN

(whisper)

Peter?

In the moonlight, only half of Peter's face shows a smile. Whitley shakes his head in disgust, oblivious of the boy beside him.

WHITLEY

Grayback drunk.

He spits on John and walks away.

John remains motionless staring up at his friend. It's been a long, long time. John opens his mouth, but he is so overcome that he can't even manage a sound.

Peter turns to leave and as he does so the thick white slab of his revealed skull reflects in the moonlight. John gawks into the endless black abyss of Peter's eye socket. Any words that John might have found immediately evaporate into the night.

John tries to keep his eyes open as his fallen friend disappears into the dark, but after a few moments John's world fades to black.

EXT. SALOON - EARLY MORNING

John wakes to the pounding of hammering iron. His eyes dart to the spot where he last saw Peter. He finds two Chinese rail-workers staring back at him.

RAIL-WORKER 1
(in Chinese)
How do you think he ended up in there?

RAIL-WORKER 2
(in Chinese)
Maybe that's where he sleeps.

RAIL-WORKER 1
(in Chinese)
Wouldn't we have seen him before?

John glares at them as he struggles to his feet.

JOHN
Fuckin' rice niggers.

The two watch John limp off, shaking their heads.

RAIL-WORKER 1
(in Chinese)
Drunk.

African American workers, Chinese workers, Caucasian workers, work in divided groups, in weary mechanical unison.

John struggles to keep his feet as the bustling workers walk through him.

EXT. CITY STREETS - LATER

The city's pre-industrial charm is visible in the morning light. Chattering townsfolk walk along the main road surrounded by brick-laid buildings.

John keeps his head down and limps apart from the masses.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY GROUNDS - LATER

The university sits atop the prettiest section of the city overlooking the railroad and the river. A chapel commands the perfectly groomed campus square surrounded by ivy-covered marble buildings.

The different congregations of the affluent, white, male student-body, walk gaily through the lawn, unaware of, or deliberately ignoring, John as he limps on by.

INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - LATER

John is hidden between a row of shelves. Thankfully no one is there to see him furiously rifle through the literature. In rapid succession he tears open the cover, flips through the pages and tosses it aside. There is a growing mountain of disappointments beside him.

But unbeknownst to John, he is not alone...

Tucked in the shadows and peeking over a copy of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein: Or the Modern Prometheus* is a young Native American man. He is in that indistinguishable age between teens and adult. He wears a hand-me-down suit that is clearly meant to pass him as a student, at a glance, and which he clearly hates. It is his obvious intellect that he much rather wears as he besets the expectations of white men everyday. This is APENIMON.

In a fit of rage John flings a book against the shelf. Apenimon is unable to stifle a laugh. John turns around in a fright, thinking he's been caught. He sees Apenimon and his growing smile. John's stomach turns.

INT. COYFRIED'S OFFICE - LATER

The space is a morgue and a classroom all wrapped into one. There are more human skulls lining the shelves than books.

DOCTOR COYFRIED, an old and astoundingly plump Southern gentleman, sits, or rather molds, to his chair. He stares tirelessly through his thick spectacles at a skull. In his hand is a phrenologist's chart, equipped with labels on the different sections of the cranium.

At the moment, Coyfried is studying the skull's perception of time, a shade above the eye socket.

John is about to walk in, but something stops him, the hanging skeleton him at the door. John stares at the skeleton, and the haunting image of Peter stares back at him.

Coyfried looks up and sees John entranced. He can see John's fear and it makes him smile.

COYFRIED

I always found fear to be an irrational response. From the outside, an evil man can pass by and most would think nothing of him. They would not know his deeds or his character. They would only see a man. Yet, you open up a good man and show these same people his inner architecture, all they would see is a monster. Ironical...

John looks back and, to his relief, he only sees the skeleton.

COYFRIED (CONT'D)

Come sit. You will have more time for him later.

John follows his command.

COYFRIED (CONT'D)

Do you know why I asked you here, Mr. Cutler?

John wrings his hands awkwardly, knowing the answer but not wanting to say it.

JOHN

Well I don't mean to be presumptuous Professor-

COYFRIED

Doctor.

JOHN

"Doctor." But everybody in Bendwood knows your business.

COYFRIED

And what is my business?

John lowers his eyes to the skull on Coyfried's desk. Coyfried notices and holds the skull in his hand.

COYFRIED (CONT'D)

Did you know, Mr. Cutler, that the cranium of the Negro is twelve percent smaller in circumference than the cranium of either you or me?

JOHN

No sir.

Coyfried looks at the skull as if it should know.

COYFRIED

But if I was to ask you what race has the greatest capacity for complex and abstract thought, I presume you would answer it is the white man.

JOHN

Yes sir.

Coyfried motions for John to lean over.

COYFRIED

Come.

John freezes at the demand. He finally acquiesces and dips his head, allowing Coyfried to press his fingers into his scalp.

COYFRIED (CONT'D)

Yes. I am glad you kept your appointment, Mr. Cutler. Some men just aren't equipped.

The moment Coyfried's hands leave his head John shoots up.

JOHN

Equipped for what?

COYFRIED

Equipped for my business. The business of scientific justice.

John stiffly stares again at the skull.

COYFRIED (CONT'D)

There are two caches of redskin remnants out west. I need you to retrieve them for me.

John can hardly believe his ears. Coyfried bluntly presses on.

COYFRIED (CONT'D)

You get an advance now and a healthy fraction at every stop along the way. The largest sum will come from my man in Oregon. When you return you will receive the rest from me.

JOHN

Doctor I-

COYFRIED

You will leave tomorrow. My contact, a particularly young and intelligent savage by the name of Apenimon, has promised to guide.

John's eyes go wide with recognition. Coyfried sees his concern.

COYFRIED (CONT'D)

Don't worry about the boy. This is his passage home. He has as much at stake in this as I do. Besides...

A devilish grin spreads across Coyfried's face.

COYFRIED (CONT'D)

One can only stray so far from nature.

John shakes his head, still unsure.

JOHN

I don't know.

Coyfried grows annoyed.

COYFRIED

I expected better. Especially from a man who comes from the selfsame proud and honourable lineage as myself.

Coyfried looks down at John, recognizing more than just the swollen and dirty man before him. He wobbles in his chair and points out the window.

COYFRIED (CONT'D)

Look outside, Mr. Cutler.
What do you see?

John traces Coyfried's finger to the railroad.

COYFRIED (CONT'D)
They say that we are entering a new
age. An age when man can make
wonders that trump even those
manifested by God. And when a
united nation is not simply a
saccharine figure of speech.

Coyfried's tone grows colder.

COYFRIED (CONT'D)
But what are they saying about
ancestors? What are they saying
about the sweat of those men's
brows? About the values consecrated
by men like you and me?

John can't answer him. Coyfried studies him, praying that
John finds the answer. He realizes John needs more. He places
his weight on the skull and struggles to his feet.

COYFRIED (CONT'D)
Come.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPUS CEMETERY - LATER

Coyfried leans heavily on his cane as he waddles between the
rows of tombstones. John stays one cautious step behind.

They finally stop at a grave marked with an American flag.
The tombstone reads...

"Daniel Fourier
Beloved Student, Son and Patriot"

COYFRIED
I don't suppose you know anything
about Mr. Fourier, but contrary to
that flag planted on his grave, he
was a son of the Confederacy. A
proud Virginian who left his
schooling out of loyalty to kin
without so much as a second
thought. Of course, as wars go, he
died.

Coyfried turns to find John holding his head low.

COYFRIED (CONT'D)

But rather than honoring his memory with the flag of the family he held so dear, the school buried him in this hole and stabbed him with the emblem of his enemy.

Coyfried pokes John hard in the chest with his cane.

COYFRIED (CONT'D)

Mr. Fourier is not the only student to leave this school and die in battle.

John looks at the row of graves, all marked with their very own American flag.

COYFRIED (CONT'D)

But you and I both know that the man who dies in battle is not necessarily the man who dies in war. The man who dies for family. The honor of being buried here is fraudulent. They have violated Daniel's memory by doing so.

John begins to understand.

COYFRIED (CONT'D)

We live in a delicate time, Mr. Cutler, where the powers that be would rather see our sacrifices, and even worse, our families buried underneath the guise of progress.

Coyfried leans in for the kill.

COYFRIED (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Bring back the boy's tribe and I'll preserve ours.

John stares at Mr. Fourier's grave, with new meaning.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. IOWA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The sun shines down on endless fields of rolling greens and farm cropped yellows. It is the idyllic image of the Iowan countryside.

Soon laughter fills the summer air. On one of these green hills race two boys, a much younger and cheerier John, and a scarless, effervescent Peter. The two roughhouse and run through the hills, happy as can be.

EXT. CREEK - LATER

The two friends lounge with their feet in the water watching as the sun dips into the rolling hills. They don't have a care in the world, and both are simply happy to be alive in this moment.

JOHN

You talk about that poem too much.

PETER

It speaks to me.

JOHN

(mocking)

"It speaks to me."

Peter splashes water in retaliation and the two laugh. Peter falls back into his loving trance with the world around him. It's all that matters to him.

PETER

You don't see it?

JOHN

See what?

PETER

This. All of this.

JOHN

I sure do. I see it every damn day.

Peter smiles and shakes his head. He knows that John just doesn't understand.

PETER

No.

But a dark thought suddenly saps the sun from Peter's complexion.

PETER (CONT'D)

It can't all last though...

JOHN

What do you mean?

PETER

At some point it's all gotta go.
It's just the way it is. Every calf
turns to dinner. Every fall turns
to winter.

John is struck by Peter's sincerity and tone.

PETER (CONT'D)

That's what he's talkin' about.

JOHN

No Pete. I don't think any of this
is gonna' change.

Peter can only force an insincere smile.

The two look back out at the darkening horizon.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. JOHN'S HUT - NIGHT

John wakes in a sweat.

The moon shines brightly through the window of his depressing
tool-shed of a house.

John pulls a flask from underneath his pillow and takes a
much needed pull. He goes over to the window. He sees the
moonlight striking the railroad. From his tiny hut, it's the
only thing he can see.

John takes another drink.

EXT. BENDWOOD MAIN ROAD - DAY

Crowds of people walk through the street and go about their
day-to-day routines.

Apenimon stands on the side of the road with two fully packed
horses, ready for the journey. He gazes through the throngs
of people into a book vendor's store across the street.

INT. BOOK VENDOR - CONTINUOUS

John self-consciously peers around the collection of books.
He fights the urge to ravage through the vendor's collection.

The elderly vendor watches from the counter.

VENDOR

Might I help you, sir?

John's embarrassment shows clearly.

JOHN
D'you got any Keats?

VENDOR
Who?

JOHN
K-Keats.

VENDOR
Hmm. I'm not sure that I do. What's
his genre?

John's ready to leave.

CUT TO:

EXT. BENDWOOD MAIN ROAD - DAY

Apenimon watches John stomp his way out of the shop and cross the street.

APENIMON
You find what you were looking for?

John tries to let the comment go.

JOHN
Wasn't lookin' for nothin.'

John quickly scans the crowd for Whitley before rapidly packing his horse.

APENIMON
You're not a person who often
partakes in conversation.

JOHN
Well I just enjoy movin' more than
I enjoy talkin.'

John keeps his eyes low, doing everything in his power not to look Apenimon in the eye. Apenimon notices.

APENIMON
Does traveling with a "savage" make
you uncomfortable?

The question catches John by surprise. He finally meets Apenimon's gaze.

JOHN

No...

The tension rises.

APENIMON

I wouldn't be surprised if you were. I imagine there are many elements of this quest that would make a man uncomfortable.

John buckles under the weight of Apenimon's implication, wondering what he knows. But Apenimon lets out a good-natured laugh and John quickly resumes his furious packing.

John sees Whitley cross the street, out of the corner of his eye.

JOHN

Let's go.

They ride carefully through Bendwood. John keeps his back to Apenimon and continues to avoid eye contact.

APENIMON

Doctor Coyfried has told me a lot about you.

John doesn't answer.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

He told me that you were something of a war hero.

JOHN

I wouldn't go that far.

APENIMON

He told me that you'd be modest. But he assured me that you were a true southern hero, which got me wondering...

Apenimon pauses as he carefully chooses his words.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

What makes a Confederate war hero move to such a dead city like Bendwood?

JOHN

Money.

APENIMON

That's a fair, if not hackneyed response.

John winces under Apenimon's microscope.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

And I'll presume that the money, or lack there of, was what inspired this confederate war-hero to travel cross-country with a "redskin."

John hands wring the reins as he prays for Apenimon to shut up.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

I don't mean to put you through the proverbial wringer. I would just like to get to know the man I'm traveling with is all. Besides, I've never met a war hero before.

John finally cracks and takes the offensive.

JOHN

Y'know the Doc's told me a little somethin' about you too.

APENIMON

I'm sure he has.

Apenimon smiles, welcoming the impending attack.

JOHN

Yeah. He told me quite the story about your father. He told me that he practically took to drownin' himself in a bottle of that "fire-water" you folks are so fond of before one night he decided to let the river finish the job for him. He said they found him one morning on the river bed, filled half and half with water and whiskey.

APENIMON

That sounds accurate.

Apenimon's still smiles.

JOHN

Now I find that mighty interesting.

APENIMON

Do tell me why, Mr. Cutler?

JOHN

Oh I just think it's bum luck is all. Man drags you halfway across the country for a better life, only to die and have you decide that the better livin' was back the way you came.

Apenimon's expression turns contemptuous.

APENIMON

That's precisely right, Mr. Cutler. You're quite intuitive. Before my father chose to engorge himself with all of that "fire-water", he believed that we would be better off living with people like you, Mr. Cutler. But, there is something my father used to tell me that's stuck with me. The weary traveler will always pay a toll but the man who is stays at home never pays at all.

Apenimon narrows his eyes.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

I'm done paying tolls for a place that isn't my home.

John realizes he over-stepped his bounds. He falls silent.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

I'm surprised Mr. Cutler. I wouldn't have thought that a soldier of fortune would waste money on literature.

John lets the dig go. The two ride along the railroad in a strained silence.

EXT. THE ROAD - DUSK

As dusk falls the silence between the two travelers deepens. They continue to ride between the railroad and the river. While John listlessly traces the tracks out into the never-ending distance, Apenimon fixes his eyes on the sun-streaked river, searching for something unseen.

He steals a glance at John and studies the man with earnest curiosity, as if absorbing every detail on his bruised face might explain his deep anguish.

John notices him staring and sends him a deadening scowl. Apenimon let's out a familiar laugh.

John shakes his head, but his eyes go wide when the sleeve on Apenimon's arm jump to his elbow. John sees a series of long fresh cuts along the top of Apenimon's forearm. The shock forces John to turn away. He looks back out onto the road as the weight of the journey finally sinks in.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

The two have a camp set up underneath the starry frontier sky. Apenimon sleeps tentless beside the river and John sits alone in front of a fading campfire. John wears that same weary expression as he drinks from his flask and watches the embers die.

He looks through the flame and sees Peter sitting across from him. The contours of his injury show in the moonlight.

JOHN

Do you only show up when I'm drunk
or feelin' sorry for myself?

There's no response.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I s'ppose the two go hand in hand.
But if that were the case I
should've been seein' you years
ago.

Again, no response.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Do you talk or is it only me?

John chuckles, discovering his answer.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Boy I'm in some grisly shit now,
Pete. I can tell you that.

Just the thought of the journey drives him to take another pull.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Hell, maybe this is some sort of
punishment.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)
Travel cross-country, just waitin'
to get my throat slit by some
redskin cub when he learns that
he's been sold a pack of lies.

John shakes his head in disbelief.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I'll admit, he's different this
one. He ain't like the ones we used
to see at the farm. Still... If I
don't trust him I don't know how
the hell he can trust me. I sure as
shit wouldn't blame him for offin'
me. I know I'd slit the throat of
the sonofabitch' who'd rob your
grave.

For a moment John eyes meet the ghoulish socket in Peter's
skull. He has to look away.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I can't even explain why I'm doin'
this.

John shakes his head.

JOHN (CONT'D)
How the hell am I supposed to do
this Pete?

John struggles to look at the skull of his old friend.

JOHN (CONT'D)
The fuck if I know. Like I said,
maybe this is some sort of
punishment. S'ppose it'd make up
for some things.

John's eyes start to well up.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I miss you, Pete. I really do.

Unbeknownst to John, Apenimon is behind him, watching this
sentimental moment. He can only see John and the fire.

JOHN (CONT'D)
But there's nothin' I can do. No
matter how hard I try I'm losin'
them, Pete.

John sniffles hard.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I'm losin' the goddamn words.

John finally gathers the strength to look back through the flame, but Peter isn't there. Alone with his shame, John goes back to his flask. It's empty. He angrily tosses it into the flames.

Finally, Apenimon gently makes his presence known.

APENIMON
It's a beautiful night.

John quickly fights to compose himself.

APENIMON (CONT'D)
Sometimes nights like these are
best appreciated alone.

To John's dismay, Apenimon sits right next to him.

APENIMON (CONT'D)
But I have found that more times
than not they are better
appreciated with company.

There's a long moment of silence as John wonders how much Apenimon has heard. Apenimon cuts in.

APENIMON (CONT'D)
I know your quest's purpose.

John nearly jumps out of his seat.

JOHN
How do you know?

APENIMON
I've known Doctor Coyfried for
nearly half my life. It would be
foolish to presume that I wouldn't
know his work.

Apenimon chuckles to himself.

APENIMON (CONT'D)
But perhaps I have allowed my own
presumptions to get the better of
me. I acted rudely before and for
that I apologize.

Still in shock, John has no idea how to respond.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

Truth be told, I've never been at ease around white men. By the time my father died I had already long planned my return home. That's why I allowed myself to act the part of the unknowing fool. A part that Doctor Coyfried was more than happy to accept.

Apenimon gives John a look of pure sincerity.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

You need not worry about me. Know that when you dig up the skulls of my tribe you will remain undisturbed and unharmed. I only want passage home, Mr. Cutler. Trust me or not, know that is my one and only agenda.

Apenimon extends his hand.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

I hope that you now understand my sincerity in completing this quest. And one day, I hope to better understand yours.

John cautiously takes it.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

We are not far from our first site. Enjoy your conversation amongst the stars.

John watches Apenimon walk back to the river. His eyes are drawn to the sleeve covering Apenimon's scar striped arm.

Still unsettled, John turns back to the empty spot where Peter was once sitting, and watches as the last ember finally goes out.

EXT. IOWA ROAD - DAY

Cornfields now dominate the scene as the two ride lethargically through the new landscape.

Below him, John sees his younger self with Peter, happily running through the fields, their grand white farmhouse at their backs.

But in mid-stride a scythe floats through Peter's imagined body and wakes John from his fantasy.

John finds the scythe belongs an ancient man chewing tobacco and cutting down the corn. John tips his cap. The old man spies Apenimon and spits tobacco juice in his direction.

John looks back out over the fields. The corn is wilted and the house is desolate.

EXT. WAPELLO - LATER

It is a small sparrow-fart of a town, seemingly more dead than alive. There are a few rickety buildings that surround the town's one road. A mostly completed railroad appears to be the only way out.

The town's poor condition troubles both John and Apenimon.

They hitch their horses.

JOHN

Wait here.

APENIMON

(sarcastic)

Gathering supplies?

John grimaces as he hopelessly walks off to find a book vendor.

Resigned to wait, Apenimon leans against his horse and takes in the town. It is lifeless. Only the swirling of road dust in front of the church demonstrates any sort of movement. Apenimon can see this is a place to leave not stay.

Suddenly, a gust of wind whips a handbill across his face. He pulls it off his cheek.

A massive demonic cartoon-train is shows prominently at the center of the page. Equipped with a pair devil horns and razor sharp teeth, the train rips through a barn, chasing after a young farm boy.

In big bold black letters the bill reads,

"DREADFUL CASUALTY!

FARMERS LOOK OUT FOR YOUR CROPS, LAND AND CHILDREN!

THE LOCOMOTIVE DESTROYS ALL!"

A shout from the railroad steals Apenimon's attention. He sees a group of young boys cruelly laughing as they hurl rocks at a pair of Chinese rail-workers.

A voice, smooth as silk, slithers up from behind Apenimon.

MR. OLIVER
Barbaric, isn't it?

Apenimon turns around to a man in his early thirties, dressed in impeccably dapper clothing, with a top-hat and a chic, thin, mustache. This is MR. OLIVER.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
But who could blame them when all they are taught is fanaticism? I'm sure they've heard enough zealous and antiquated sermons to inspire a new crusade.

Mr. Oliver motions to the handbill in Apenimon's hand.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
The sensationalism never ends.

Apenimon turns back to the railroad. One of the workers charges the children with his hammer. Their laughter erupts into screams and they quickly scatter away.

CHINESE RAILWORKER 1
(in Chinese)
Good! Run you little demons!

CHINESE RAILWORKER 2
(in Chinese)
Why did you do that? You know they will be back again.

The two continue hammering the iron, sadly awaiting the children's return.

APENIMON
It's fear.

Apenimon looks at him with knowing confidence.

MR. OLIVER
Fear? This whole town is clinging tooth and nail to their Bibles. You introduce something even slightly foreign, such as, say, modernization, and these people act as if they missed the rapture.

Apenimon watches one of the boys return to the tracks.

APENIMON

When you threaten someone's way of life, then what was once sensational becomes rational. It's fear of the unknown.

MR. OLIVER

Fear of the unknown is nothing more than a fear of change. It's xenophobia. It's self-afflicted blindness. It's ignorance.

Apenimon and the boy's eyes meet.

APENIMON

You make it sound like they are at fault.

MR. OLIVER

They are at fault.

Apenimon finds Mr. Oliver has come uncomfortably close to him. The two study each other closely.

JOHN

Can I help you?

Both Apenimon and Mr. Oliver jump at the sound of John's voice. John gives them a suspicious glare.

MR. OLIVER

Well, that depends. Are you a man who can only see the world in rosy reflections and fatalistic premonitions?

John's doesn't understand a word Mr. Oliver just said and it makes him angrier. Apenimon offers a helpless shrug.

Mr. Oliver extends his hand.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)

My name is Alexander Oliver.

John grips it with purpose.

JOHN

John Cutler.

MR. OLIVER

My new friend-

Mr. Oliver waits for Apenimon to introduce himself.

APENIMON

Apenimon.

MR. OLIVER

Apenimon and I were discussing the town's apprehension towards progress. You see, Apenimon here believes that their fear is rational and well-founded since progress, in this case the railroad, challenges their way of life.

John's jaw drops as the man goes on and on.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)

I on the other hand believe-

JOHN

Who are you?

MR. OLIVER

Alexander Oliver.

JOHN

No, no. Who are you? What is it that you want?

MR. OLIVER

I want for nothing. I'm the north-western regional train agent.

Mr. Oliver smiles proudly, but that's all John needed to hear to leave.

JOHN

(to Apenimon)

Let's go.

John mounts his horse.

MR. OLIVER

I take it that you are a man with strong convictions concerning the railroad.

JOHN

Sure am.

Apenimon gives the agent an apologetic look and hops on his horse. Oliver jogs to keep in step with the other two as they ride through town.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Look at that. I didn't know snakes could run.

MR. OLIVER

Mr. Cutler, won't you at least extend me the courtesy of an explanation.

JOHN

(sarcastic)

Explanation of what?

MR. OLIVER

Apenimon here, had the decency to articulate a very well-thought rebuttal. Might you do the same?

JOHN

I'm not feeling very decent, Mr. Oliver.

MR. OLIVER

Fair enough. How about an indecent response?

John considers.

JOHN

People like you are ruining these towns. You're making this part of America out to be some sort of play set for big whigs and industry men who have never set foot outside of their mansions.

MR. OLIVER

As you can see I've taken more than a few steps.

JOHN

Well I wouldn't think to call the hole you crawled out of a mansion.

John gives a "winning" smile to Apenimon, but he is unrequited.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Anyways you people come out here and set your tracks and in the process you ruin the lives of everyday people.

MR. OLIVER
So you're looking out for the
little guy?

John nods firmly.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
That's admirable, Mr. Cutler.
Truly. But, if you thought this
town is some sort of pretty slice
of the American frontier, then I'm
afraid you're mistaken. Pretty as
it might be, the truth of the
matter is this town, and many
others like it are dead. And the
reason they died is because they
were unable to catch up.

Mr. Oliver jogs quicker to keep pace.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
Fortunately, the worst is over.

JOHN
And what about the people who can't
catch up?

MR. OLIVER
Like I said, the worst is over. The
land has been bought, the people
have been compensated, and now the
best and brightest are here to
bring these towns out of their
little religious cocoons and up to
speed in the modern age.

John's stomach turns from Mr. Oliver's growing grin.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
So what has you two fine gentleman
heading West?

John shoots Apenimon a glare. Oliver catches it.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
Oh he hasn't told me anything. It
doesn't exactly take detective work
to figure you two were only moving
through this shell of a town. So
what line of work has a white man
and a learned Indian traveling
west?

JOHN
We're on a mission... To save towns
like this.

Oliver laughs hard at the lame line. John burns red with embarrassment. He tries to save himself.

JOHN (CONT'D)
It's a... *fair-no-logical*
expedition

MR. OLIVER
A phrenological expedition?

Apenimon does his best to hide his amusement.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
(to Apenimon)
Is that right?

Apenimon nods.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
Well isn't that something? Here try
me.

He takes off his cap and offers the top of his head to John, which, of course, only makes John burn redder.

As they reach the edge of town, Apenimon sees the young boy again. The boy curiously looks up at the Native American on horseback.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
In truth, we are on the same
mission, Mr. Cutler. But if you'd
prefer we can just go on pretending
to be mortal enemies.

Apenimon gives a nod. But the boy sticks out his tongue and pulls out a rock. Apenimon waits for him to throw, but he doesn't. The boy just holds the rock in a cocked position.

JOHN
(to Apenimon)
C'mon.

MR. OLIVER
Well, good luck on your honorable
quest!

Oliver yells as John and Apenimon ride away into the distance.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
Don't let him drag you on for too long, Apenimon. You're gonna' want to find shelter. There's a storm comin'!

Apenimon turns and sees the boy watching him ride away. There are dark storm clouds brewing overhead.

EXT. IOWA ROAD - LATER

The dark storm clouds now swallow the sky and engulf John and Apenimon in shadows. The two ride in silence. While John fumes from atop his horse, Apenimon contemplates the impending storm.

APENIMON
Perhaps he's right.

John delivers a deadening glare.

JOHN
You think he's right? A man like that doesn't care about these towns. He doesn't care about these people. He'd let em' starve and rot under the tracks before he'd lift a finger to help em'.

John's aggression catches Apenimon off guard. He opens his mouth to explain, but not before John begins another tirade.

JOHN (CONT'D)
You wanna know why I'm doin' this? You wanna know why I'm travelin' hundreds of miles, shovel in hand?

Apenimon awaits his answer with genuine curiosity.

JOHN (CONT'D)
It's to stop men like him! To stop these snake oil salesmen who lie through their fuckin' teeth to make a-

A thunderous BOOM cuts John off.

APENIMON
I was talking about the storm.

John composes himself as Apenimon rides on. His face shows his disappointment in John's answer.

EXT. IOWA FARMHOUSE - LATER

Thunder cracks the heavens and brings a furious rain down upon John and Apenimon. The two tear down the mud-soaked road toward a nearby farmhouse.

The house is immense but decrepit. The structure looks hollow and more ready to fold into itself than to hold a family.

Drenched and desperate, John comes to the front door. But the moment his knuckles hit the wood, the door creaks open.

A pair of sharp but nervous eyes show and a frail and skittish voice squeaks through the crack.

WOMAN

Yes?

JOHN

Ma'am, I'll get right to the point.
It's rainin' harder than hell out
here and I was hopin' that we could
use your barn for the night. Just
until this storm breaks.

The pair of eyes look past John and focus intensely on Apenimon.

WOMAN

Would y'all rather a bed?

John and Apenimon share a look of grateful surprise.

INT. FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Two pairs of soaked boots come off as the two men come inside.

The interior of the house is warm and filled with the charm of a full family. Yet, when John looks around, he can't find a hint that anyone besides this woman lives here.

The woman fidgets about as the two men get more comfortable. She's old with messy grey hair and lines across her mouth from the singular worried look that's been etched on her face for the last decade. This is EDITH.

Edith's catches John staring. With her frantic eyes she directs John to the shotgun above the fireplace.

He gets the message.

EDITH

You're not from town are you?

JOHN

No ma'am.

She observes him closely. Finally, she lowers her guard.

EDITH

Good.

Suddenly, her shoulders relax and her nervousness disappears.

EDITH (CONT'D)

There's stew on the stove. Should
be enough for the two of you. Go
help yourselves. I just have to go
make the beds.

JOHN

Ma'am?

She stops mid-turn, her face frozen with some unknown fear.

JOHN (CONT'D)

We never got to introduce
ourselves.

Edith lets out a small gasp of relief.

JOHN (CONT'D)

My name's John Cutler. This here is
Apenimon.

Again, Edith's eyes fall upon Apenimon with curiosity.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Just thought you might like to know
the men you're accommodatin'.

EDITH

Name's Edith.

She holds her stare an awkward moment longer before finally
catching herself.

EDITH (CONT'D)

You two go make yourselves at home.

She murmurs something to herself as she retreats up the
stairs.

John turns to Apenimon, the moment she's gone.

JOHN

You see anybody else around here?

APENIMON

No.

JOHN

Did you get a look at the crops?

APENIMON

No.

The two move to the kitchen.

INT. EDITH'S KITCHEN

The stew boils on the stovetop. John takes a look inside, there's enough there to feed three people, at least.

JOHN

There ain't no way she's out
farmin' on her own. She's barely
fit enough to push a broom.

Apenimon isn't sure of what John's implying.

APENIMON

She looks like she's getting it
along.

JOHN

Those were pity crops out there.
She's gettin' by on neighbors
sympathy. I think we found
ourselves a mother of the war. A
widow.

John lowers his voice to a whisper.

JOHN (CONT'D)

We need to tread carefully. We've
got ourselves a delicate situation.

APENIMON

Why is that?

JOHN

This is a woman who's lost
everything and is now stuck livin'
alone on this farm. It's obvious
she's doin' what she can to hold
this place together, for
appearance's sake, of course.
That's a delicate situation.

APENIMON

Perhaps she is still in mourning.

John glares at Apenimon for his addition.

JOHN

"Mourning?" The war's been over for five years. No, I've seen my share of widows and I can tell you this is one. We gotta be careful though cause they're an excitable breed. Right now she's doing everything she can to keep this place lookin' as pretty as it did before, and she's losin' her head just doin' that. Now she's got two strange men in here and a train comin' to wreck this place. All I'm sayin' is, at any given moment, she's bound to turn into one ole' ornery b-

John steps on a wooden choo-choo train and yells in agony.

JOHN (CONT'D)

OW!

Apenimon watches John jump in pain and can't help but smile.

CUT TO:

DINING ROOM - LATER

Even with the three of them sitting, the large dining room table looks terribly empty. John and Apenimon quietly eat, keeping their eyes on their stew. Edith tries to keep to herself but she can't help but stare at Apenimon.

EDITH

You eat this sorta' stuff?

The question catches Apenimon by surprise.

APENIMON

Every once in a while.

Edith shakes her head a little too happily.

EDITH

Oh good.

The awkward silence continues. John tries to cut in.

JOHN

Thanks again for taking us in out of the blue and all.

EDITH
Oh please it was nothing.

JOHN
You've got a lovely farm. I can see
this place is cared for.

This makes Edith fidget in her seat.

EDITH
Thank you.

John, unaware of the discomfort he's causing her, keeps
pressing.

JOHN
I was a farm boy myself.

She nods politely.

JOHN (CONT'D)
So y'know I can really tell when a
place is well takin' care of and
uh... this place is well takin'
care of.

No nod from Edith. She is almost shaking in her seat.

John continues to look to liven up the dinner. He spies a
confederate flag rolled up and hidden in the corner of the
room. Just as he suspected, she's a mother of the
confederacy. Edith notices the direction of his gaze and
tightens up even more.

JOHN (CONT'D)
You were a mother of the
Confederacy.

Edith looks down at her stew.

JOHN (CONT'D)
It ain't nothin' to be ashamed of.

EDITH
I ain't ashamed.

Apenimon watches with curious concern.

JOHN
How many?

Edith takes a deep cleansing breath.

EDITH

Three. My husband and two boys.

John nods.

JOHN

I'm sure they did you proud. A lot of brave men fought in that war.

Something in Edith cracks. Apenimon notices but John remains unaware. There's a long silence as something bubbles up inside Edith. She is nearly vibrating in her seat when her voice abruptly bursts through her wrought lips

EDITH

Damned stupid war if you ask me.

John cocks his head in surprise. Edith grows stronger and more impassioned with every word.

EDITH (CONT'D)

Just a bunch of boys playin' with their playthings. Wanna' go out and shoot each other - expectin' it to be like huntin' turkeys on Sunday mornin'. But they don't think about what they're fighin' for. No. They don't think about what they're leavin' behind.

Silence. Edith glares into her stew bowl. John tries to think of something to ease the tension but he's lost for words. Apenimon watches respectfully.

EDITH (CONT'D)

A husband and a son dead for Lord knows why.

APENIMON

I thought you had two sons.

John shoots him a deadening look for correcting her, but Edith gives Apenimon a reassuring nod.

JOHN

You don't have to talk about this if you don't-

But the fury in Edith's eyes stops John and shoots his tail between his legs.

She emits a low growl.

EDITH

He ain't dead. He left for that war stronger than a bull only to come back smaller than a mouse. I seen it. After five years of livin' as a widow and childless mother on this here farm he come back.

Her voice softens as she sadly remembers.

EDITH (CONT'D)

I remember seein' him stumble down that road. I swore I was dreamin'. I couldn't believe my eyes.

Tears start welling up.

EDITH (CONT'D)

He stayed for dinner. Reassured me he was real. Reassured me I wasn't dreamin'.

Suddenly she bangs the table. The fury comes back to her voice.

EDITH (CONT'D)

Then! Right then! Right when it all starts feelin' real again he's gone!

Edith's seat can't contain her and she stands, her voice a clenched mess of sorrow and rage.

EDITH (CONT'D)

Five years of not seein' his mama.
Five years of not seein' his home.
Five years of not seein' his god damn wife! And still he leaves to go West. And you know why!? Why he possibly could leave all of this AGAIN!?

She stares, wide-eyed, at her two frightened guests. Realizing how impassioned she just was in front of two strangers, Edith turns bright red and lets out an embarrassed chuckle. She immediately slides back into her seat.

EDITH (CONT'D)

Well I've certainly embarrassed myself.

John looks away, still feeling emasculated by Edith's outburst.

APENIMON

No.

Apenimon leans in. He meets her gaze with a look of understanding. She smiles gratefully.

The three sit for a long silence as the tension melts away.

Finally, Edith clears her throat and her squeaky nervous voice returns.

EDITH

I should go.

John looks away as she takes her bowl and leaves. The moment she turns away, Edith's face deliberately relaxes into a composed and capable expression.

JOHN

That fuckin' war.

Apenimon looks up to see John fuming at his end of the table.

JOHN (CONT'D)

They act like it's over but it ain't. And all those who were lucky enough to only be chewed up by the fuckin' thing haven't even begun to see the real damage.

APENIMON

What are you talking about?

John speaks in a hushed fury.

JOHN

I'm talkin' about the railroad, and men like Oliver, and all of this "progress" bullshit.

John motions to the house.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You think all this is gonna' last? People like Edith are about to be flattened. You just wait. In two months time those neighbors won't be givin' out pity crops. They'll be workin' day and night on their own farms fightin' to survive. You wanna' know why I'm doin' this? That woman is livin' proof.

Apenimon gives John a moment to vent his anger.

APENIMON

I think she is still in mourning.

JOHN

The hell with that. I already told you-

APENIMON

I'm not disagreeing with you. What I'm saying is that what we just witnessed was a manifestation of a long-subdued grief.

John bitterly looks away. Apenimon tries again to reach him.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

What do you do when you lose a loved one?

JOHN

Bury em'.

APENIMON

Precisely. You dig a six foot hole, recite a Bible passage and move on.

John doesn't like Apenimon's implication.

JOHN

What're you playin' at?

APENIMON

Your ceremony demands that you bury your attachments and heartache with the deceased. In essence, your culture doesn't allow you to properly grieve.

JOHN

"Properly grive?" You're about to lead a man to dig up your family.

Apenimon winces, but he let's John's remark go.

APENIMON

In my village they dedicate days to singing and crying for their lost loved ones. There are no constraints or judgments on how you express your grief, so long as you do. Some swim naked in the rivers, some cut their hair and there are even those who take more drastic measures-

Apenimon realizes he's gone too far. John notices. He immediately looks at Apenimon's covered forearm.

JOHN

Like what?

Apenimon feels trapped underneath John's stare, but he doesn't answer. John decides to find out for himself. He stands up and moves slowly to Apenimon. He lingers over him. They both know what's under Apenimon's sleeve.

Finally, Apenimon yanks his arm from his sleeve, revealing the long fresh scars across the top of his forearm. John freezes, immediately regretting his actions.

APENIMON

The intent is to allow an emotional and spiritual release. How is this any worse than being hopelessly shackled to the memories of a loved one?

John can't bring himself to answer. He helplessly watches Apenimon return his arm to the sleeve.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

I hope you know what you're looking for. Maybe tomorrow you might begin to find out.

Apenimon leaves John to think about tomorrow's task.

INT. EDITH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The house is completely dark and still. John and Apenimon sleep on opposite ends of the floor.

Slowly and quietly, a small figure glides down the stairs and into their room. It spies Apenimon in the corner and steps gently to his side. Apenimon still sleeps, softly unaware of the figure.

The figure looks at Apenimon's long braided hair splayed across the floor. With cautious curiosity, the figure reaches out its tiny hand and feels a braid. It holds it delicately, tracing the ridges of where each braid meets.

Feeling the figure's presence, Apenimon's eye opens. He quickly turns on his side, making the figure frantically jump away into the heavy shadows. It lingers at the staircase.

For a long silent moment, Apenimon and the figure hold each other's gaze through the dark. Neither one breaks the stillness.

But then a creak as John turns over in his sleep and the figure disappears up the stairs. Apenimon stares blankly at the spot where the figure just stood. He feels his braid and tries to decipher what just happened.

INT. EDITH'S BARN - EARLY MORNING

Barn doors creak open and morning light pierces through darkness. John steps through the crease.

He looks around. To his surprise, the barn is well-stocked with well-kept equipment. This is a thriving farm.

John shakes his head in happy disbelief.

EXT. EDITH'S HOUSE - LATER

Apenimon walks out of the house, still shaken from the night before. John comes barreling in.

JOHN

Hey!

Apenimon nearly falls over.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I just peeked in her barn and this
ole' hen's doin' better than I
thought.

APENIMON

You went in her barn?

John's face goes red. This wasn't a side of him he planned on sharing.

JOHN

I figured I might lend a hand is
all. Bein' on a farm again got me
itchin' to put these ole' farm
hands to use.

Apenimon gives a brief nod and starts packing his horse. His mind is still preoccupied with the events of last night.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Hey.

Apenimon tensely turns around.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I didn't...

John takes a deep breath as he fights for the words. He's not used to making apologies.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I didn't mean nothin' last night.

John tries to say more but this is as far as he can go.

JOHN (CONT'D)
C'mon let's go.

The two mount their horse.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I wonder what the hell kinda magic
she got hidin' up there in that
house?

Apenimon's wondering the same thing. As he rides away, Apenimon looks up at the house's second-floor window. Looking back at him is a young mulatto girl. Her small hands pressed against the glass are the same that held Apenimon's hair the night before.

Apenimon smiles knowingly and rides off.

Edith puts her hand on her granddaughter's shoulder. Together they watch the two men disappear into the horizon.

EXT. IOWA ROAD - LATER

The sun beats down on the two travelers. Neither one has spoken to the other since they left. The implications of the day's task hangs between them.

Apenimon finally breaks the silence.

APENIMON
Do you miss this place?

John has to consider this. It's not a thought that has crossed his mind before.

JOHN
Not all of it.

APENIMON
What brought you to Bendwood?

JOHN
The war.

APENIMON
I didn't know there was any
fighting in Bendwood.

John doesn't laugh at Apenimon's snarky response.

JOHN
I s'ppose I sorta' just ended up
there.

Apenimon waits for more, but he knows that John isn't ready to give him a real answer.

CUT TO:

EXT. IOWA ROAD - LATER

The two are off the side of the road along a beautiful stretch of grass. They are, once again, rejoined by the river, which rushes peacefully by their side.

John tears into his beef jerky in silence. Apenimon doesn't eat. He sits and watches John at a distance, again studying and trying to understand this sad and angry man.

Apenimon moves from his spot and sits beside John.

APENIMON
What do you remember about this
place?

John doesn't want to go through this again.

JOHN
The cold winters.

Apenimon waits for a real answer. John finally snaps.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Why're you askin'?

John sighs and looks out over the long beautiful plains, taking in the greenness of the fields and the blueness of the endless sky.

John's throat clenches up.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I don't know.

Apenimon sees the pain.

APENIMON

When we left my village, my father told me I could only take one thing with me. One thing to remember home by and then leave the rest behind.

John finds himself listening.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

I looked and looked, but I could never find anything that seemed more important than the rest. The more I tried to choose one thing the more I wanted everything. I ended up leaving with nothing at all.

John seems to understand as he looks out over the beautiful fields where he and Peter once played.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

At first I did not understand. How could I? I was so young. Of course, I've come to realize that the things that I've missed most were the things I could not take.

John can feel the heartbreak in Apenimon's story but he doesn't bring his gaze from the fields. Apenimon sees this and joins him and smiles softly. He knows, for now, this is as far as he's going to get with John. Together they look out over that beautiful stretch of land.

Something inside John finally snaps and he quickly stands up.

JOHN

C'mon.

Apenimon watches as John grabs the shovel. He knows what's coming next.

EXT. IOWA ROAD - LATER

Each step is painstaking, for the two, as they walk along the riverside. John keeps his head down. They stop at a long patch of dirt. Apenimon turns to John. This is it.

JOHN

You're sure this is it?

Apenimon gives a sober nod.

JOHN (CONT'D)

The hell happened to the tribe?

APENIMON

They died some time ago from a tribal war. At least that is what my father told me. But I honestly don't know to tell you the truth.

John grips the shovel tightly.

JOHN

Y'know originally I was gonna' have you run off and pick some flowers while I did this. But seein' that you know everything, I figure there ain't no reason why this should be a one man job.

Apenimon gives a biting smile.

APENIMON

On the contrary. I'm just a dumb "redskin." I haven't the faintest clue of your intentions.

JOHN

So you're choosin' to play dumb?

Apenimon looks at him hard, giving him one last chance.

APENIMON

I am on your clock, John.

Apenimon folds his arms and turns towards the river. John takes a deep breath. The shovel shakes in his hand.

The sound of the blade piercing the ground makes Apenimon wince. There's no going back.

CUT TO:

EXT. IOWA TOWN - DUSK

A hand shakes a hand. Apenimon joylessly watches from afar as John leaves a heavy bag with a man in a suit. John puts his hat down and pockets an envelope.

Neither John nor Apenimon make eye contact as they mount their horses.

JOHN

Let's go.

They ride toward the setting sun, through the dusty streets of the rickety old farm town.

EXT. IOWA ROAD - DUSK

No words are spoken. There is only the light sound of rushing water. The two ride trapped between the river and the railroad. The darkening sky seems to reflect the mood, casting a dim grey pall over the empty fields.

They pay no attention as they pass a bouquet of flowers and a cross lying beside the rail.

John keeps his head down.

JOHN (V.O.)
Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy
store?

The crashing of the water grows louder and slowly overpowers John's thoughts.

JOHN (V.O.)
Whoever seeks abroad may find-
Whoever seeks abroad may find...

The water grows LOUDER. John's struggling to even think.

JOHN (V.O.)
Steady thy-

And LOUDER.

JOHN (V.O.)
Steady thy...

Soon the crashing of the waves morphs into an unbearable high pitched ring. John has to close his eyes. He furiously fights the pinging, the crashing, the thoughts, everything bouncing around in his skull.

Then suddenly, he hears a familiar voice.

PETER (V.O.)
Where are the songs of Spring?

John opens his eyes and he finds himself...

CUT TO:

EXT. CIVIL WAR BATTLEFIELD - DUSK

It is the aftermath of battle on some muddied god-forsaken field. The grass is torn up and strewn with mounds of bullet-ravaged flesh. Young men, both Confederates and Yankees decorate what was once a beautiful southern orchard with their blood.

Only the soft-footsteps of John and Peter break the stillness. They walk among the dead, collecting rifles and munitions.

The two boys are now men and it is clear that they have seen their fair share of battle.

John sees Peter lift a blood-splattered Bible from the wreckage. There's a bullet hole through its center.

JOHN

Guess God can't save everyone.

Peter's in no mood for jokes. He sadly shakes his head and tosses the Bible aside.

PETER

No burials or nothin'. Shame.

John bends over and struggles to remove a rifle from a dead Yankee's grip. The dead soldier's rigor mortis proves too much and John falls over. Peter glares at his friend for his lack of respect.

PETER (CONT'D)

John, will you stop doin' that.

John quickly picks himself up as Peter drops his share of collected munitions.

PETER (CONT'D)

I'm done with this.

JOHN

What?

PETER

I'm done with this and you are too.
C'mon now, stop this foolishness.

John reluctantly obeys his beloved friend.

Peter looks out far beyond the field to a house perched up on a hill. It is the perfect spot for a spectator's view of the battle.

JOHN

You s'ppose they'll bury any of
these poor sonsabitches'?

PETER

Who's they?

John doesn't know the answer.

PETER (CONT'D)
I thought I saw a kid earlier. A
little girl. I bet you she used to
come down in this here field to
play. A meadow like this on a hot
summer's day. Probably just like
the creek back home.

John doesn't understand Peter's sentimentality. Peter grabs
John by the shoulder and looks him fiercely in the eye.

PETER (CONT'D)
You got memories of that creek?

JOHN
Sure.

PETER
You got fond memories of that
creek?

JOHN
Course' I do, Pete.

Peter turns back to the house.

PETER
What do you s'ppose they'll be
rememberin' about this meadow?

John's face drops with recognition.

CAPTAIN
Plainsmen!

A Confederate Captain yells to them from behind a line of
worn and weary soldiers.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
We're tryin' to make camp before
dark.

John turns to Peter, begging him to return with him. Peter
only lets out a deep sigh and resigns to obey.

PETER
Where are the songs of spring?

CUT TO:

EXT. IOWA ROAD - NIGHT

John wakes with a start. The once deafening river roar is now
a soothing patter.

John looks around as he furiously fights to get his bearings. Everything's dark save for the campfire and the moonlit river, yards away.

John whips around in his seat, desperately trying to find Apenimon and the horses. He expects the worst, but he immediately finds the horses hitched and Apenimon peacefully asleep by the water's edge.

John lets out a deep sigh of relief. He turns to find the haunting spectre of Peter staring at him through the fire. Peter's skull seems more pronounced than ever. But, John's eyes are again drawn to his friend's eye-less socket.

JOHN

I'm tryin' to do right here, Pete.
I swear I am.

John shakes his head, slowly horrified by the realization of what he's just done.

JOHN (CONT'D)

The more right I try to do-

John looks away as his emotions swell.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I just can't shake it, Pete. I just
can't shake this fuckin' thing.

John gathers the courage to look up at his friend, but when he raises his head, there's nobody there. John is all alone with his shame.

EXT. IOWA ROAD - MORNING

The sun is high in the sky and the sound of birds chirping harmonizes with the soft sounds of the river's current.

John has a biscuit in his mouth as he prepares for the day's ride. The color has returned to his face.

Apenimon wakes up and sees John doing well. He walks up from the river. The two men exchange polite, though awkward, nods. The tension from yesterday's task still lingers.

APENIMON

You look well-rested.

JOHN

Sleep will do that.

APENIMON

Indeed. Some nights it is better to
sleep under the stars.

The two nod and go about preparing for the day. John realizes
he should say something.

JOHN

Apenimon...

Apenimon looks up in surprise.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I know that we haven't been on the
best footing, you and I. But you
didn't take advantage of me when I
was feelin' some type of way. So-

John awkwardly fumbles for the words to thank him, but
Apenimon comes to his rescue.

APENIMON

Our journeys are the same, John.

John nods in agreement.

JOHN

You know, you don't have to sleep
by the river every night?

APENIMON

What if I prefer to?

JOHN

Well you're more than welcome to
sleep there if you want. I'm just
lettin' you know that uh... never
mind.

John finishes packing his horse.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Did you eat yet?

Apenimon shakes his head.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Here.

John reaches into his pocket and hands him a biscuit. This
act of kindness surprises even John.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I wanna' get on the road.

But Apenimon smiles, seeing through John's terseness.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - DAY

The two follow the road up to a thick sea of trees. Apenimon waves John on and the two are swallowed by the darkness.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - LATER

The sun pokes holes through the leafy ceiling, illuminating the browns and greens of the woody nature.

John curiously watches Apenimon admire the scenery with a child-like enthusiasm.

JOHN

You're lookin' at those trees like
a sinner looks at a whore house.

Apenimon laughs.

APENIMON

That's a unique way to put it. I
suppose then you should call me a
poet.

John doesn't understand. Apenimon awkwardly tries to explain his joke.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

It's a joke playing on the fact
that the poets of the Romantic era
shared a special bond with the
living world around them.

John's curiosity becomes piqued.

JOHN

You read any of these poets?

APENIMON

A few. The Professor's library
leaves much to be desired for the
poetry lover. What I've read was
found in the University's
collection. Really I am not much of
a poetry lover. These forests just
remind me of home.

JOHN

You got trees like these?

APENIMON

Plenty. My village was deep in the heart of a wooded ocean.

Apenimon falls deep into reflection.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

I remember finding spots to spectate starry nights were hard to come by. It was a luxury to find a place, on a starry night, where you could stare up at the heavens and have the heavens stare right back at you. My father, was the best at finding those spots.

John can feel the love in Apenimon's memory. He looks up but the tree cover is impenetrable.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST ROAD - LATER

A once tiny seed of curiosity has blossomed in John's mind. Finally against his better judgment he asks the question.

JOHN

So what's gonna happen when we get there?

He cringes at his own lack of tact.

APENIMON

What do you mean?

Apenimon sees the guilt on John's face and lets out a chuckle.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

Oh. Well I suppose my tribe will have you strung up by your toes and tear you limb from limb. While they drink your blood I'll be doing my best to hide in the brush. And when you're good and dead I will magically appear for my hero's welcome.

John doesn't like this joke at all.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

Not the answer you were hoping for?

John angrily grumbles beneath his breath. Apenimon drops the joke and turns serious.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

To tell you the truth I don't know.

JOHN

Well what're you hopin' will happen?

Apenimon considers the question and then he realizes something...

APENIMON

You know, I could ask you that very same question.

Once again, John finds himself against the wall. Apenimon watches him squirm and decides to come to his rescue.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

I'm hoping to find open arms.

John nods, understanding the sentiment. The two ride on. John looks through the thicket of trees and slowly collects his thoughts. Finally, he answers.

JOHN

I don't know much about the science in all of this. But I s'ppose I want things to go back. If this job is a way of preventin'-

John tries to find the rest of his answer but he simply can't. He goes back to the easy answer.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I just want things to go back.

EXT. VALLEY ROAD - DUSK

The two finally make their way out of the wall of trees. They now find themselves at the edge of an endless valley. Once again, the train track and the long river line the land.

John shakes his head in disbelief as he drops his stuff for the night.

JOHN

I thought we lost those fuckin' things.

Apenimon points out into the distance where a mountain blocks the valley road.

APENIMON

That is where we are going.

John squints at the expanse he must still travel.

EXT. VALLEY ROAD - EARLY MORNING

The morning sun peaks over the mountains and casts a long shadow over the valley.

It's a cold morning and John is shivering from atop his horse. Apenimon takes notice.

APENIMON

It's the valley mornings. The sun hides behind the mountains until midday. Then the land is left to thaw in the afternoon heat.

John shivers in response.

In the far distance he sees what appears to be a town by the riverside.

JOHN

You know that place?

APENIMON

No.

JOHN

Well, we're stoppin' there. Coyfried be damned. I need a fuckin' coat.

CUT TO:

EXT. ANTON - LATER

It is a river city, with docks for boats and buildings set up along the shore. From afar, John and Apenimon can see what appears to be anchored boats. Yet, the closer they get the more the city looks like a battered war zone.

Everything is grey and weathered. The shore is a graveyard, with caved-in buildings, broken docks and scattered steamboat remains. John and Apenimon are both horrified.

CUT TO:

EXT. ANTON STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Left on his own, again, Apenimon examines the city's inner-workings. From within, the city looks marginally better.

People are still out and about, going through their routine as if all the water-logged buildings and washed wreckage was simply customary scenery.

Apenimon grows melancholy from the scene. But two men passing by grab his attention.

Apenimon follows them, with his eyes, down the street. They are not unique in dress, nor posture and they easily dissolve into the crowd. Yet, it is their foreign language that grabs Apenimon's attention and their swarthy Native-American faces that freezes him in his tracks.

A familiar and silky smooth voice comes in from behind him.

MR. OLIVER

Expectation demands a certain way
of seeing things. When something
appears that is out of the ordinary
for whatever reason we betray the
laws of nature and stagnate.

Apenimon turns to find Oliver with a bright and, slightly, condescending smile.

APENIMON

What law are we betraying?

Mr. Oliver steps forward. The two watch the Native Americans disappear seamlessly into the crowd.

MR. OLIVER

The law that demands that
extraordinary things should always
be embraced. You should know this.

Mr. Oliver leans in closer.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)

You are extraordinary.

The implication surprises Apenimon. Mr. Oliver continues.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)

I've found that the remedy lies in
transition. A change too abrupt
disrupts order. People lose their
understanding of the world and
become scared of their own shadow.
But, if you transition slowly then
people might just be willing to
accept it as part of their day-to-
day lives.

APENIMON

You have a wonderful way of making
the parasitic sound parasitic.

Mr. Oliver chuckles.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

You really do a terrible job of
masking railroad talk under layers
of feathery rhetoric.

MR. OLIVER

Well then I guess it's a good thing
that I'm not really here to sell
change... Just ensure that it
occurs punctually.

Mr. Oliver smiles warmly. He genuinely likes Apenimon.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)

I meant what I said. You are
extraordinary. All I had to do was
take one look at you to know it.

APENIMON

Why? Because I can speak your
language as fluently as you?

MR. OLIVER

Yes. And because you survived. You
are living proof of nature's law.

He gives Apenimon a knowing look.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)

As I'm sure you can see, this city
has seen better days. This was once
a flourishing river metropolis.
Traders came through the river
daily, making this place something
of a capital in interregional
commerce. Every brick laid and
dollar made came from that river.
But of course, what made this city,
eventually broke this city.

Mr. Oliver speaks solemnly but purposefully.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)

About a year ago, a blizzard comes
through the size and scale that
these people had never seen. But
that wasn't the worst of it.

(MORE)

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)

You see the river froze over, and as the water started to move again, large chunks of ice found their way onto the shore. Eventually it all melted and the city was flooded. Docks, buildings, boats, everything this city was built on was destroyed.

Apenimon looks over the wreckage and imagines the flood.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)

"It is not the strongest nor the most intelligent that survive, but the ones most responsive to change." You see, despite what your surly friend thinks, I am a needed entity.

Mr. Oliver motions to the undamaged railroad on the city's outskirts.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)

It's been over a year now and this city has barely learned to crawl.

He holds Apenimon's gaze for emphasis.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)

But it *will* crawl and it *will* walk again.

Apenimon nods with new understanding.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)

This country is changing, Apenimon. Old is being replaced by new. The antiquated is being replaced by the educated.

Mr. Oliver leans in closer.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)

This is a world in which an extraordinary person will not only fit, but flourish. This new world needs you.

JOHN (O.S.)

You pull him off the bottom of one them boats?

Mr. Oliver and Apenimon turn to find John, watching them for who knows how long.

MR. OLIVER
(to Apenimon)
Speak of the devil and he will
appear.

John trudges toward them, not a bit happy to see Mr. Oliver.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
Mr. Cutler, charming as ever I can
see.

JOHN
I'd ask you how you were but I'm
afraid I don't give a damn. Go make
yourself useful and drown in the
river.

Mr. Oliver chuckles.

JOHN (CONT'D)
(to Apenimon)
Let's go.

Apenimon notices he's still shivering.

APENIMON
You didn't find yourself a coat?

John's face is ridden with guilt. Mr. Oliver cuts in.

MR. OLIVER
If it's too cold you two are always
welcome to take the train.

John snorts.

JOHN
Oh yeah? It doesn't look like your
little choo-choo set is ready for
play-time.

MR. OLIVER
Oh but it is. You see, I'm simply
here for final reviews. I'm sure
you'll be happy to hear that our
pacific northwest rail opens in
three days.

John's face drops.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)

That means people leaving on
opening day in Chicago will only
have to wait twenty-four hours to
wave to you on your final stretch
through South Dakota.

Mr. Oliver's good-natured smile gets a little brighter as
John stews.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)

But I'm sure the toil of the
journey has a better pay-off.

JOHN

(to Apenimon)

C'mon.

John impatiently hops on his horse. Mr. Oliver gives Apenimon
a nod, but the young man gets on his horse without a word.

As he rides out of town, Apenimon looks over at the remnants
of the flood and then at the tracks on the opposite side.

EXT. THE VALLEY ROAD - LATER

The two ride deeper and deeper into the valley. Although the
city is barely visible behind him, Apenimon's thoughts are
still with Anton and with Mr. Oliver.

John, on the other hand, has shaken his bad temper and now
finds himself staring out into the endless valley. For once,
he seems at peace as he watches the sun sink into the horizon
and cast colorful streaks across the western land.

JOHN

Seems easy for a man to get lost
here.

John's voice startles Apenimon. He finds John connecting with
the land.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Hell, even Oliver's tracks seem to
get lost.

APENIMON

It's certainly vast.

John perches higher on his horse when he spots a herd of
bison.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

Have you ever seen bison before?

JOHN
Only heard of em'.

John shakes his head in awe.

JOHN (CONT'D)
This place comes with all sorts of
surprises doesn't it?

John turns and sees the cloud hanging over Apenimon's head.

JOHN (CONT'D)
The hell's eatin' you? We're in
familiar territory, I thought you'd
be your usual cheery self. Remind
you of home or somethin'.

APENIMON
I'm just remembering a story my
mother told me when I was younger.
Actually, she told it to me the
night before we left.

JOHN
How's it go?

APENIMON
You want me to retell it?

JOHN
Sure. Not doin' much of anything
anyway.

Apenimon can see that John's serious.

APENIMON
There were two young bison
brothers, Chayton and Kangee. Each
brother was known for a particular
trait. Chayton was known for his
tremendous strength while Kangee
was known for his cunning. Despite
their differences, the two were
beloved by the rest of their herd.
They protected their own, they
followed their herd's traditions
and they were regarded as good
bison.

John listens as he closely watches the herd. It's as if he is
trying to find the bison brothers amongst the pack.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

However, one day a great fire swept through their land and separated Chayton and Kangee from their herd. The fire lasted for days, but when it finally cleared, the two found that all the other bison had perished. They were on their own, the only two from their herd.

John winces.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

For a while, the two stayed the land of their family and for the most part they were able to get by. But eventually the brothers found themselves in a dispute regarding how they should continue. Strong Chayton believed that they should remain and roam the burned fields that their ancestors had for years before them. Kangee disagreed.

Apenimon sees a flock of birds fly through the sky.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

After watching the birds of the land migrate one by one, Kangee declared that they should live as the birds lived and leave their land. Chayton found this plan to be unacceptable, even disrespectful. The two came to blows, with the stronger Chayton proving to be the victor.

Apenimon goes quiet, but John wants more.

JOHN

What happens to Chayton?

Apenimon sees the genuine interest in John's face.

APENIMON

He-

But right as his mouth opens, a blood-curdling scream rings through the valley.

MAN

HELP!!!

The hair on both John and Apenimon's neck stand up in unison.

MAN (CONT'D)

HELP!!!

The two tear off down the road.

EXT. THE VALLEY ROAD - LATER

The scream grows louder as the two approach the valley's edge. Ahead the road narrows and hooks around into a mountain path. John and Apenimon look around but they can't find the source of the screams.

MAN

HELP! HELP GOD DAMMIT! HELP!

A man lays on his back, in the brush, beside the road. His leg is twisted into an unnatural shape.

John and Apenimon rush to his aid. Up close, he seems to be in even worse condition. He is outfitted with an unkempt beard and a tattered suit that is welded to his tiny frame like the dirt and blood is welded to his skin. This is BEN GARLEY.

JOHN

Shit it's busted.

The man writhes in the dirt and whimpers pitifully.

APENIMON

What happened?

The words tremble out of his mouth.

BEN GARLEY

I w-w-was coming down the r-r-ridge
when somethin' s-s-spooked my
horse.

John turns around, but there's no horse in sight.

JOHN

Where's she now?

BEN GARLEY

I d-d-don't know. S-S-She bucked me
and r-r-run off.

John takes control of the situation.

JOHN

(to Apenimon)

Go look for the horse.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)
My guess is she didn't go back up
on the mountain so go look along
the valley.

Apenimon nods but he doesn't leave.

John leans in.

JOHN (CONT'D)
What's your name?

BEN GARLEY
B-B-Ben. B-B-Ben Garley

JOHN
Alright, Ben...

Ben nods uncontrollably.

JOHN (CONT'D)
This is gonna' hurt like a
sonofabitch.'

BEN GARLEY
Wha-

But before Ben realizes what's happening, John swiftly yanks the mangled leg back into place with a resounding SNAP. Ben wails with inconsolable agony. He succumbs to the pain and faints.

Apenimon cringes, but he gives John and impressed nod.

JOHN
I told you these farm hands could
do some work.

EXT. VALLEY ROAD - CAMPFIRE - DUSK

Camp is made only a few yards off the road, beside the river. John tends to a fire while a now lucid Ben sits with his leg tightly set in a makeshift splint. He happily tears into John's supply of jerky like he hasn't eaten in days.

John looks out over the darkening valley sky.

JOHN
Hopefully the boy's back soon.

Ben speaks with his mouth full.

BEN GARLEY
What's his name again?

JOHN

Apenimon.

Ben takes another vicious bite of jerky.

BEN GARLEY

"A-pen-i-mon." Do you know what that means?

JOHN

No.

BEN GARLEY

It means "trust-worthy." Ain't that funny?

Ben violently coughs out a piece of jerky.

JOHN

What were you doin' up in those mountains?

Ben hacks up some more food.

BEN GARLEY

I was headin' east of course.

JOHN

Why's that? I thought everyone was wantin' to go west.

Ben lets out an hysterical laugh.

BEN GARLEY

They sure do don't they? They sure do? People got no sense about what's out there. Not a damn clue. Let's just say I've run into enough trouble out west to know that runnin' east is the sensible thing to do.

He laughs louder. John takes in the man's derelict appearance.

JOHN

What sort of trouble?

Ben smirks. The words rapidly tumble out of his mouth, as if each one was fighting to get in front of the other.

BEN GARLEY

I was a photographer once. Worked for a big name too.

(MORE)

BEN GARLEY (CONT'D)

Under the employ of the famous Mr. Brady. He had me takin' photos durin' the war. After that whole mess cleared, Mr. Brady, bein' the bright man that he is, had himself a bright new idea. The man who captures American history as it unfolds, wanted to capture the coming step in our country's grand-little story.

Ben becomes more and more crazed with every word.

BEN GARLEY (CONT'D)

And he said, in no uncertain terms, "damned the past and damned the present. Our future is in the west."

John stares blankly at this deranged man ferociously eating his jerky.

JOHN

What happened?

CUT TO:

EXT. VALLEY WILDERNESS - CONTINUOUS

Atop his horse, Apenimon searches for Ben's nag.

BEN GARLEY (O.S.)

It's all a lie. Just a steamin' pile of horse shit they've been feedin' us since the war.

Apenimon looks out at the beautiful vast horizon.

BEN GARLEY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

There ain't nothin' out there.

Apenimon rides up a bluff.

BEN GARLEY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

And it took me losin' everything to realize it.

Apenimon reaches the top of the hill. Under the vibrant star-lit sky, he can see the fallen horse in the distance. He rides toward the fallen steed.

CUT TO:

EXT. VALLEY ROAD - CAMPFIRE - CONTINUOUS

BEN GARLEY

So who's got you strung up in their web. Who's feedin' you a line of shit?

John is unsure how to answer.

JOHN

I've been contracted to dig up Indian skulls.

It takes a moment for it to register with Ben. Suddenly he busts out laughing. John sits uncomfortably as the laughter grows louder and harsher.

BEN GARLEY

Oh I promise I'm not laughin' at you.

He takes a pause to consider.

BEN GARLEY (CONT'D)

Well I s'ppose I am.

He snorts at John's expense.

BEN GARLEY (CONT'D)

Oh boy. "Indian skulls?" That's certainly a new one. I ain't judgin' you, honest. I've seen enough sorry bastards out here lookin' for Camelot and a pot of gold to know better.

This annoys John.

JOHN

There ain't no pot of gold.

BEN GARLEY

Oh don't fool yourself. There's always a pot of gold. You wouldn't have come out this far if you weren't hopin' for some pot of gold. It's like trainin' horses with the carrot and the stick.

(MORE)

BEN GARLEY (CONT'D)
Right now they're tellin' everybody
about the carrot in hopes that we
somehow forget the stick.

CUT TO:

EXT. VALLEY WILDERNESS - CONTINUOUS

Apenimon carefully approaches the fallen horse.

BEN GARLEY (O.S.)
Problem is, there ain't no carrot.

The horse is alive, but barely. It's sickly thin and frail.
There isn't a chance it could ride again. Apenimon
sympathetically strokes the horse's mane. He looks out at the
river in the distance.

BEN GARLEY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Gold, trains. They'll promise us
the world if they thought it'd make
us forget the hell they created.

Suddenly, Apenimon's own horse starts to whinny. A shiver
shoots up his spine as the howls of coyotes bellow in the
distance.

CUT TO:

EXT. VALLEY ROAD - CAMPFIRE - CONTINUOUS

BEN GARLEY
Those redskin skulls, that Camelot
you've been promised... You're only
outrunnin' the stick.

John listens apprehensively.

CUT TO:

EXT. VALLEY WILDERNESS - CONTINUOUS

Apenimon's horse whinnies louder as the pack of coyotes prowl
closer and closer. Apenimon hushes the fallen horse softly
and looks it in the eye. He knows what he must do.

BEN GARLEY (O.S.)
But when that stick finally catches
you...

Then in one strong swoop he plummets his knife into the
animal.

BEN GARLEY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
There will be blood.

CUT TO:

EXT. VALLEY ROAD - CAMPFIRE - CONTINUOUS

The ominous words hit John at his core. Ben takes another gleeful bite of jerky.

BEN GARLEY
What about the cub? Huh? What about Apenimon?

JOHN
What about him?

BEN GARLEY
How do you think he'll react when he finds that his carrot doesn't exist?

JOHN
He just wants passage home.

BEN GARLEY
Passage home so you can dig up his mommy and daddy?

Ben smiles at John's growing discomfort.

JOHN
I trust him. He's a good man.

Ben laughs again.

BEN GARLEY
Good men don't lead men to their parent's graves.

John's face drops. He might be right. Just then Apenimon rides in. Ben smiles as if nothing has happened.

BEN GARLEY (CONT'D)
And the fair prince returns.

John doesn't look up.

APENIMON
(to Ben)
I found your horse... I'm afraid she's passed.

Ben goes silent as the news hits him. Suddenly he snaps.

BEN GARLEY

The fuck did you do to my horse!

John immediately comes to Apenimon's defense.

JOHN

Hey!

APENIMON

Nothing. I found her by the riverside. She had fallen.

BEN GARLEY

"Fallen?!"

Ben slowly composes himself.

BEN GARLEY (CONT'D)

"Fallen?"... How the hell am I supposed to travel?

JOHN

We can take you to the town over in the morning. I'm sure we can find someone to fix you up and take care of you.

BEN GARLEY

That town?

Ben points in the direction of Anton.

JOHN

I'm sorry. We don't have the time. We'll hump you over the mountain and find you the first something over there.

Ben's eyes go wide with terror. John watches as Ben struggles to find even the semblance of a word to express his displeasure. But the deranged man only gives a resigned nod.

JOHN (CONT'D)

We'll get you there first thing in the morning.

Apenimon watches Ben listlessly stare into the flames.

EXT. VALLEY ROAD - CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

A full moon shows brightly in the valley sky. Apenimon sleeps soundly next to the river. His soft breath in tune with the humming of the current.

There is a faint PLOP as something drops into the river. Then another PLOP. Apenimon opens his eyes. Another PLOP. He sees a tiny pebble whistle high above his head and PLOP into the river. Apenimon finds Ben with his hand cocked to nonchalantly toss another pebble.

He smiles sarcastically. His yellow teeth show in the moonlight.

BEN GARLEY
Did I wake you?

APENIMON
No.

Ben tosses another pebble. PLOP. Apenimon sits next to this strange man.

APENIMON (CONT'D)
How are you?

BEN GARLEY
I'm fuckin' dandy.

Another pebble soars through the air. PLOP.

BEN GARLEY (CONT'D)
I gave you a scare back there,
didn't I?

Apenimon smiles politely.

BEN GARLEY (CONT'D)
I didn't mean nothin' by it.

APENIMON
I'm sure you'll be back on your way
in only a matter of time.

BEN GARLEY
Oh I'm not goin' where you're
goin'. I can tell you that.

He lets out a grunt with another toss. PLOP.

APENIMON
What are you trying to accomplish?

BEN GARLEY
Ain't it obvious? I'm tryin' to hit
the moon.

PLOP.

APENIMON

Why?

BEN GARLEY

Because I can.

He turns in his seat looking for more pebbles.

BEN GARLEY (CONT'D)

You ever heard of the dead soldier
who tried to walk to the moon?

Apenimon shakes his head.

BEN GARLEY (CONT'D)

Well that's because it didn't
happen that way. You see, right
before this poor sonofabitch' died
he met some wayward priest who told
him that everyone's got it wrong
about heaven and hell.

Apenimon listens closely.

BEN GARLEY (CONT'D)

The priest says there really ain't
no hell, only blackness, and there
ain't really no heaven, just the
moon. He says that people were
wrong to think that when you died
you could just simply float up to
heaven. Supposedly, the truth is
that when you die you are given a
choice. You can either be like
everyone else and let yourself sink
into a black oblivion. Or you can
walk your way up the moon light to
the happily-ever-after that God
intended.

Apenimon is at a total lost.

BEN GARLEY (CONT'D)

Of course, after hearin' this
malarkey, not one day goes by and
POW! A bullet rips through his
fuckin' skull.

Ben knocks a pebble to his forehead.

BEN GARLEY (CONT'D)

But after a few moments of darkness
the soldier manages to open his
eyes.

(MORE)

BEN GARLEY (CONT'D)
To his surprise he finds himself
floating in mid-air with a dozen
other dead soldiers.

Ben points up to the radiant full moon.

BEN GARLEY (CONT'D)
And that's when he starts thinkin'
about that priest again. While all
the other dead soldiers hovered
above their bloody corpses, the
dead soldier starts walkin' his way
up the moonlit path. The other
soldiers start callin' for him.
They're screamin', sayin' he's
crazy, beggin' for him to come
back. But he just keeps walking up
higher and higher to that golden
ball of heaven.

Apenimon finds himself staring at the sky.

BEN GARLEY (CONT'D)
And then right when he thinks its
all working out, right when he
forgets about dying and his life
before.

Ben heaves a pebble toward the moon and whistles as it
finally falls from the heavens all the way down into the
river. PLOP. Apenimon's jaw goes slack.

Ben leans in with some nefarious hidden information.

BEN GARLEY (CONT'D)
You're a Wapeko aren't you?

Apenimon is beyond words.

BEN GARLEY (CONT'D)
You folks like water.

Ben lets out a chuckle and tosses another pebble. PLOP.

Unbeknownst to the two of them, John lays on his side,
listening in discomfort.

EXT. VALLEY ROAD - CAMPFIRE - EARLY MORNING

The fire is out and the sky has the beautiful rosy hue of
early morning. John wakes and finds the spot where Ben slept
empty.

John gets to his feet and scans around the camp. He sees Apenimon and their two horses, but all across the vast valley there's no sight of Ben.

Apenimon wakes. He immediately recognizes what's happened.

APENIMON

He's gone.

John is frozen in bewilderment but Apenimon goes about clearing the camp.

JOHN

Guess he really didn't want to go back. At least he didn't take the horses.

Something finally pops into John's head.

JOHN (CONT'D)

What happened to the bison?
The story. What happened to Chayton?

Apenimon again finds himself surprised by John's sincere interest.

APENIMON

Well Chayton stayed and eventually he found other bison and made his way in the world.

JOHN

And Kangee?

Apenimon chews his tongue. He's afraid of the answer.

APENIMON

And Kangee was rejected by the birds and was left to perish.

John stares back out over the valley, giving one last look for Ben. He seems to understand.

JOHN

Shit.

Apenimon watches as John kicks away the soot from the fire. He is still unsure of the story's moral.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

The weather turns colder as the two men slowly ride up the winding road. The valley behind them grows smaller and more distant with every passing second.

There is a troubling silence between John and Apenimon as their thoughts linger with Ben.

John's horse lets out a terrified whinny at a particularly treacherous bend in the road.

JOHN

You and your father really climb these?

Apenimon looks back in surprise.

APENIMON

Yes.

Apenimon starts to recall the journey.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

I remember being very scared on this road. The walk up seemed to last a lifetime. But memory gets distorted over time. It's very likely it took no more than a day.

The two share a light-hearted chuckle. Something continues to chew at John's mind.

JOHN

What do you remember about your village?

APENIMON

In truth... not much.

John's nods, but Apenimon's not finished.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

I remember mostly how large my father was. He was the biggest man in my village. Seemed just about as big as a tree. Everyone had to look up at him when they talked.

Apenimon's tone grows colder as his thoughts linger on his father.

APENIMON (CONT'D)
Of course my memory could be
inflating the truth after all of
these years.

Apenimon lets out a sigh.

APENIMON (CONT'D)
I've been thinking about him a lot
these last few days. I keep seeing
him bigger and bigger.

John nods.

JOHN
I know what you mean.

Their eyes meet. For the first time they've come to an
understanding.

Just then, the trees open up as the two travelers reach the
mountain's apex. In front of them is the idyllic image of
northwestern wilderness, dotted with woods and lined with
springs. There isn't a train or trace of civilization in
sight.

A warm familiar smile bursts across Apenimon's face. He
happily turns to John.

APENIMON
This is Oregon.

John is taken by this beautiful land.

JOHN
It's pretty goddamn beautiful.

The two blissfully share this gorgeous landscape.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CAMP - DUSK

While Apenimon makes camp, John is off by the peak's edge. He
has his head in the clouds as he watches the warm Dakota sun
sink into the perfect Western horizon.

Something familiar finds John.

JOHN
(soft)
Where are the songs of spring?
Aye where they?

He takes a deep breath. With renewed strength he resumes. The words are coming back to him.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Think not of em' thou' has thy
music too. While barred clouds
bloom the soft dyin' day, and touch
the stubble-plains with rosy hue.

Apenimon catches wind of the poetry. He finds John happily lost in the vista and the verse.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Then in wailful choir the small
gnats mourn. Among the river
sallows, borne aloft or skin' as
the light wind lives or dies.

Apenimon smiles and listens to this new John.

JOHN (CONT'D)

And full grown lambs bleat from
hilly borne. Hedge-cricket sing;
and now with treble soft the red
breast whistles from a garden croft
and gatherin' swallows twitter in
the sky.

John lets out a sigh of a long awaited relief. He takes one last satisfied look at the fading sun. He turns to find Apenimon has been listening to him. Apenimon only wears a warm and knowing smile.

JOHN (CONT'D)

That was all I could remember.

Apenimon nods, finally piecing together the fabric of John's being.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CAMP - NIGHT

The crickets are chirping, the stars are beaming, and the men are happily laughing.

It is a gorgeous cloudless night that has the two travelers lying on their backs looking up in awe. Slowly their laughter dies down, and they are left to reflect.

JOHN

I've missed nights like this.

John has a big smile that is unfamiliar to his worn face.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I used to have em' a lot more
often. Just lie back underneath the
stars.

Apenimon can feel the warmth in John's nostalgia.

JOHN (CONT'D)
You said you used to do this back
in your village?

Apenimon pauses.

APENIMON
Yes... A long time ago.

Apenimon does his best to mask some private heartbreak. The
two lie in a moment of silence.

APENIMON (CONT'D)
What do you remember most about
night like these?

JOHN
I don't know.

APENIMON
Think.

John thinks harder.

JOHN
I remember Pete. And I remember how
the wind seemed to die whenever he
talked.

John immediately becomes sheepish. He's shared too much.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I don't know.

John looks over and sees Apenimon staring blankly up at the
stars. John knows that there is an unspoken pain inside him.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - MORNING

The two ride down the last of the mountain path. They find
themselves at the side of a slow-moving river.

John goes right up to the river. He drops to his knees and
thirstily dunks his head in the water. However, something
keeps Apenimon glued to his horse.

John lifts his soaked head and sees two Native Americans, one man, one woman, standing on the other side of the river. They are just close enough to make him fall on his backside.

Yet, there is no tension in their presence. The two give a calm and somber nod to the two travelers. John barely manages to wave back, but Apenimon stays rigid with his jaw locked.

A small canoe sits by the couple's feet, bobbing softly against the current. The canoe is fitted with a tiny bed of tribal blankets wrapped tightly around a frail figure.

John and Apenimon freeze in place. They both realize they are witnessing a funeral.

The woman slowly wades into the water. She looks lovingly at the small shape wrapped in blankets. She utters a few soft words, and with precious care, she sets the canoe adrift.

John and Apenimon follow the floating coffin with their eyes, completely entranced. The canoe floats peacefully downstream towards a strikingly lush horizon.

After the canoe dissolves into the distance, the woman and man nod goodbye to the two travelers. John slowly mounts his horse, truly taken by the ceremony. But Apenimon's eyes go wide as he watches the Native American parents disappear into the woods. Along the top of the woman's forearm, Apenimon sees a series of long discolored scars.

As John starts to ride off, Apenimon quivers in place. He pulls his sleeve over his scarred arm and hopelessly looks down stream in the direction of the floating dead child.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

A fire burns between John and Apenimon.

JOHN

I saw the tracks again. My guess is once we wrap around those foot hills we're only a mile or two away from the city. Hopefully the Doctor's man will be there like he said.

Apenimon gives a weak nod. John can feel Apenimon's discomfort through the flame. He tosses another log on the fire.

JOHN (CONT'D)

How come they put the body in river? I thought you folk buried your dead like everyone else.

Apenimon knew this question was coming.

APENIMON

There are many different funeral rituals. For some tribes water plays a role in the ceremony. To them, it's fluidity is much like the ebb and flow of life. They believe that the running current will continuously push them on their way until they are all reunited in the next life.

Apenimon waits for John to challenge him. No confrontation comes.

JOHN

That sounds nice.

The two lie down and look up.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Another beautiful night.

John looks over at Apenimon. He's wearing that same pain-filled stare as the night before.

JOHN (CONT'D)

What do you remember about nights like this?

There's a long pause. Apenimon shakes his head.

APENIMON

I no longer remember nights like this, John.

John has to look away. Another interminable silence.

JOHN

I'm not gonna' make you dig up your tribe.

Apenimon's expression remains unchanged.

APENIMON

But you're still going to.

JOHN

Yes.

APENIMON

Why?

John really considers this question.

JOHN

Because I have to.

Apenimon studies John, once more. He sees only his resoluteness and pain.

APENIMON

I hope you find what you're looking for, John.

John takes a deep breath as he gathers courage for his next question.

JOHN

Do you think I'm a good person?

No answer comes. John winces at the silence. He turns over almost pleading for his companion's answer, but instead he finds Peter and his empty socket staring back at him.

Suddenly the sound of hell's fury rips through the peaceful Western night. Bullets, explosions, screams, rip through the air. John finds that he is no longer lying next to his friend and he is no longer looking up at a vibrant star-lit sky...

CUT TO:

EXT. CIVIL WAR BATTLEFIELD

A grey sky looms over a colorless forest and a long prairie plain. What was once a peaceful haven, away from the farm fields, is now ringing with the echoes of piercing bullets and dying men.

Outside the sphere of battle, John is pressed and shriveled against a tree, as he listlessly watches a small stream slither along the ground. Weary, hungry and scared, he is closer to the end than he is to the beginning. But still, he is not nearly as close as his best friend beside him.

Peter can only prop himself against John as he grows pale from the blood oozing from his shoulder.

With all the strength in the world he forces out a word.

PETER

Water...

His voice barely enlivens John. Finally it registers and John painfully gets up from the tree and tumbles down to the stream. As he pulls out his flask he takes a moment to absorb his haunting reflection. He looks like a ghost.

John tries hand Peter the flask, but his friend spills all over himself. John carefully brings the flask to Peter's lips and gives him the most delicate drops.

The fight behind them grows louder.

PETER (CONT'D)
Pocket...

JOHN
What?

PETER
Pocket...

Peter uses his eyes to direct John to his bloody jacket pocket. John slowly reaches inside. Peter cringes as John maneuvers around the wound. John pulls out a single sheet of paper. It is caked in dirt and blood.

It reads "To Autumnn."

PETER (CONT'D)
Read...

Something makes John pause.

PETER (CONT'D)
Read...

Peter pleadingly looks up at his friend. The fighting in the woods grows even louder.

John's hands shake furiously as he holds the poem. The blood makes the words nearly illegible. John's mouth falls open to read but he can't make the words come out.

Peter keeps looking at him, begging, pleading, desperately hoping...

John takes a deep breath.

JOHN
T-T-To-

CRACK.

Blood sprays across John's face.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPFIRE - EARLY MORNING

Crows caw overhead as Apenimon wakes from a restless sleep. He turns to the spot where John was sleeping, but he is no longer there...

EXT. FOREST ROAD - DAY

Only the faint crunching sounds of autumn leaves beneath horse's hooves break the wood's chilling silence. John rides lethargically though the endless wall of trees.

John sees Peter by his side.

JOHN

It's the right thing.

Peter looks up at him. John shakes his head. He answers himself a little less assuredly.

JOHN (CONT'D)

It's the right thing.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORD CITY - LATER

Forests. Rivers. Business. Ford City poetically balances Northwestern wilderness and turn-of-the-century industry. It is a city buzzing with people, adorned in banners, and furnished with a completed railroad.

John exits the woods with Peter. When he sees the city his eyes go wide. It is an overwhelming spectacle.

EXT. FORD CITY - STREETS

John rides through the streets, selfconsciously aware of his disorientation. Peter still walks by his side.

MR. OLIVER (O.S.)

Well I'll be damned.

The familiar voice makes John cringe. He turns to find Mr. Oliver looking up at him incredulously.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)

Mr. Cutler?

JOHN

Mr. Oliver.

John tries to hide his own bewilderment, but Mr. Oliver disarms him with a genuine smile.

Mr. Oliver looks questioningly at the empty spot beside John. The spot where Apenimon would have been.

John gives a sheepish smile. Mr. Oliver understands and he graciously moves on.

MR. OLIVER

Welcome to Ford City. She's a beauty isn't she? Why don't you hop off your horse? Let me show you around. You've come at the most opportune time.

John appreciatively follows Mr. Oliver's lead.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)

As you can see we are a city in celebration.

He points up to a banner hung across two buildings. It reads...

"OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST RAILROAD"

John only gives it a quick glance. He pays more attention to Peter, who still tags along. Mr. Oliver notices.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)

No need to be sour. I'm sure your journey still holds merit. There will be a banquet at the mayor's house tonight. I see no reason why you shouldn't partake in the revelry.

JOHN

I have someone to meet.

MR. OLIVER

Well that's wonderful since I have someone for you to meet.

JOHN

I don't wanna impose or nothin'.

MR. OLIVER

You wouldn't be imposing. I'm the banquet's planner.

He grins a little too brightly.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
Besides, how long has it been since
you've had a roof over your head
and warm food in your belly.

Mr. Oliver walks on, victorious. John takes a brief look at the banner with Peter.

EXT. FORD CITY - TRAIN STATION - LATER

John and Mr. Oliver look up, in awe, at the train. It is a beautiful black behemoth of machinery. They are alone in the station, save for Pete, who sits atop the train with his legs playfully swinging over the side.

MR. OLIVER
Six years. Six years, fifty-million
dollars, thousands of miles, and it
all comes down to tomorrow's last
spike.

Mr. Oliver is completely enraptured by the train and its significance, but John pays more attention to Peter, who continues to playfully swing his legs.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
You know what this means?

John shakes himself to attention. He sees Mr. Oliver smiling proudly.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
It means that we've done it. It
means that we've finally connected
this country.

There's no malice in Mr. Oliver's exuberance, just sheer pride. He nearly chokes on his words.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
I know you don't agree with what
we're doing here, Mr. Cutler. But I
hope you can understand-

He pauses to gather himself. John is taken by his sincerity.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
I hope you can understand the good
that will come from this.

John looks up at Peter and nods. Maybe he understands, maybe he doesn't.

EXT. MAYOR'S HOUSE - NIGHT

It is a beautiful mansion that looks like it came straight from a Dixie Land plantation. The party is in full swing and the house glows, from the inside out.

INT. MAYOR'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The interior is ruggedly beautiful. Wood floors, fur rugs, hanged heads, decorate the room. However, these decorations seem archaic and coarse compared to all of the well-dressed aristocrats and train agents strutting around the house.

John enters. He is still dressed in his dirty traveling clothes. Some passing partygoers sneer at him and hold their noses high in the air. John meets Peter's gaze. Even he seems to realize how out of place John is.

Mr. Oliver comes to his rescue. He smiles brightly as ever.

MR. OLIVER

Mr. Cutler you came! Here have a drink.

Mr. Oliver offers a drink much too rich for John's taste.

JOHN

No-

But before he can finish, the glass is dropped in his hand.

MR. OLIVER

Come. I have someone for you to meet.

INT. MAYOR'S HOUSE - SIDE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A particularly old man sits away from all of the aristocrats. He is ruggedly handsome even with a rundown face and a build that was once as strong as an ox. He brings his glass of bourbon up to his lips with a shaky hand. He angrily stares at some imaginary object in front of him. This is MAYOR STOAT.

Mr. Oliver walks in with John and Peter.

MR. OLIVER

Mayor Stoa what are you doing in here? I've been looking all over for you. Wouldn't you rather be enjoying the party?

Mayor Stoa keeps staring forward. His voice is like worn-leather.

MAYOR STOAT

Just tired.

MR. OLIVER

I have someone here for you to meet. Mr. Cutler allow me to introduce to you to the Mayor of this fine city, Mayor Jeffrey Stoa.

John extends his hand. Mayor Stoa pays it no regard and gives a drunken nod.

MAYOR STOAT

Cheers.

MR. OLIVER

Mayor Stoa was the Major General of the Army of Georgia.

John notices a small gold medal pinned over his heart.

The Mayor's head bobs again.

MAYOR STOAT

This is true.

MR. OLIVER

Ford City was fortunate enough to have him come west after the war. He's been the mayor for the past five years and he's been instrumental in the railroad's progress.

Mayor Stoa wrings his glass. He's not proud of this fact.

MAYOR STOAT

This is also true.

Mr. Oliver awkwardly waits for a lengthier response and laughs nervously when it doesn't come.

MR. OLIVER

Well... I'm going to continue to entertain. I'll let you two get acquainted.

Once Mr. Oliver leaves, John studies this old Confederate. John can see that he's a ghost of a man.

JOHN

Are you Professor Coyfried's man?

Mayor Stroat's glassy eyes don't look up. He doesn't answer, he just turns to pour himself another glass of bourbon. John watches the old man's hands tremble terribly. His eyes are drawn to the medal.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Is that for valor?

MAYOR STROAT
We didn't do medals for valor.

The Mayor nearly spills the bourbon as he brings it to his lips.

INT. MAYOR'S HOUSE - PARLOR - LATER

The room is hopelessly packed as people gather into the room. John finds himself pressed into the corner. He painfully watches all the drinking and revelry. In the opposite corner, he can see Mayor Stroat slouched underneath a stuffed bear head. He blends in with all of his archaic decorations.

A clinking glass brings a hush over the room. Mr. Oliver stands up on a chair and clears his throat.

MR. OLIVER
Ladies and gentleman. I am sorry to take time away from your festivities but I would be doing this monumental occasion a disservice if I did not say a few words.

Everyone stands at attention.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
When this project first commenced we were a country in ruin. An internal war that pit brother against brother separated us to a point that seemed beyond repair. We were fractured. We were broken.

Mr. Oliver speaks from the heart.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
But just as our forefathers before us, we found a way to prevail, to push forward through adversity by means of evolution.
(MORE)

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
Tomorrow when that final spike
pierces the soil, we are not
bidding farewell to our nation's
darkest age, but rather we are
taking our first step in its
brightest future.

The room erupts with cheers. Mr. Oliver takes a moment to
revel in the love before he hushes the crowd.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
I would also like to take this
opportunity to thank all the people
who made this bright future
possible. First, I'd like to thank
Ford City's Sheriff, the
distinguished Fredrick Buckley, for
his enduring patience and paramount
leadership throughout construction.

SHERIFF BUCKLEY, a gracefully rugged African-American
cowboy, stands and gives a polite nod to the applauding
drinkers. It is clear he is not comfortable in the spotlight.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
And of course our Mayor, the
honorable Jeffrey Stoa, who's
continuous support and steady hands
laid the foundation for this
project.

Mayor Stoa's hand shakes uncontrollably as Mr. Oliver speaks
directly to him.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
Your contributions are
immeasurable and they will be
remembered in the annals of
history.

Applause bounces off the walls. Mayor Stoa stands and nods.
His trembling hands spill his bourbon all over his shoes, but
only he and John seem to notice. As the applause dies down,
Mayor Stoa quickly makes his escape. Nobody notices his eyes
welling up.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)
And, most importantly, to you, the
investors. Drink and be merry
because it is you who have taken
the biggest stake in our country's
bright future.

The crowd erupts with drunken joy.

MR. OLIVER (CONT'D)

Have a good night!

He ecstatically jumps from his chair and absorbs the energy of the room.

Meanwhile, John desperately maneuvers his way out of the crowded room and into the hall. He needs an escape from this house, an escape from this new world. John is about to turn the corner, into a room, but inside he finds Mayor Stoa on his knees trembling uncontrollably. Peter stands over him.

John lingers for a moment when he sees Peter.

SHERIFF BUCKLEY (O.S.)

I wouldn't go in there.

John finds Sheriff Buckley propped against the wall, behind him. He too is hiding from the crowd.

There's genuine concern in his voice.

SHERIFF BUCKLEY (CONT'D)

During times like these, the man
just needs his space.

Peter nods to John.

INT. MAYOR'S HOUSE - LIBRARY - LATER

John closes the door carefully behind him. The party, outside, is starting to fade.

The room is small, only large enough for two or three bodies. Each wall is a shelf, overstuffed ceiling-high with books. John looks up in utter amazement.

The door behind him creaks open. Mayor Stoa steps in. His eyes puffy and red.

MAYOR STOA

Oh.

JOHN

I'm sorry. I didn't think anyone
would come in here.

MAYOR STOA

It's all right.

The Mayor sits against the door. John joins him. They enjoy a long moment of silence as they look up at the walls of books. The Mayor points his shaky hand towards a shelf.

MAYOR STOAT (CONT'D)
Have you read any of those books?

John doubtfully looks at the long string of books. He weighs telling the truth.

JOHN
No.

The Mayor's trembling hand moves to the center shelf.

MAYOR STOAT
What about those?

JOHN
No.

And finally, he directs his quivering hand to the right most shelf. John sighs.

JOHN (CONT'D)
No, sir.

Mayor Stroat nods.

MAYOR STOAT
Me neither...

CUT TO:

EXT. MAYOR'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Drunk partiers funnel out of the house. A figure in the dark watches them leave. As the last of them leaves he steps out of the shadows.

It's Apenimon.

CUT TO:

INT. MAYOR'S HOUSE - LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

The two ex-Confederates still slouch against the door.

JOHN
Did you come in here with the same
idea as me?

MAYOR STOAT
I don't think so.

The Mayor painfully gets up and walks over to the center bookshelf.

With a shaking hand, he pulls out a book and reveals the beautiful bottle of bourbon hiding behind it. The Mayor offers to John.

JOHN

No thank you.

John watches as the Mayor takes a long drink from the bottle. He knows this man's pain.

MAYOR STOAT

This world... This world is movin'
on without us.

Mayor Stroat takes another drink.

MAYOR STOAT (CONT'D)

But, if there's any real justice
out there, it will sure as hell
move on without them too.

He chuckles at the thought. But soon his chuckles turn into a fit of coughing. John sadly watches. The Mayor manages to compose himself. He looks John hard in the eye.

MAYOR STOAT (CONT'D)

Do you know where you're going?

JOHN

Yeah. West of here. Far along the
riv-

MAYOR STOAT

No.

He shakes his head. That's not what he meant. It takes John a moment to catch on.

Suddenly, the door opens, pushing the two of them to the side. In walks Mr. Oliver with Apenimon.

John and Apenimon lock eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAYOR'S HOUSE - LATER

Underneath the calm star-lit sky, John and Apenimon look at each other with burning intensity.

JOHN

I don't want you with me anymore.

Apenimon doesn't respond. He holds the stare down.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I don't trust you.

Apenimon smirks. He doesn't believe him.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I ain't jokin'.

There's a long silence where Apenimon looks at him knowingly. He finally cuts in.

APENIMON
You're scared.

JOHN
The hell I am.

APENIMON
But it's not because you don't trust me.

Apenimon never looks away. The weight of his stare bares into John.

JOHN
You're done! You're job's finished.
You can go to your tribe when the deed is done. Or hell just stay here with Oliver. Y'all seem to be thick as thieves anyway!

APENIMON
I am coming.

JOHN
No!

John takes a menacing step forward. He is right in Apenimon's face and standing on the knife's edge of violence.

Apenimon remains unmoved. He is a wall.

APENIMON
I will be there every step of the way.

John shakes like a frustrated child.

JOHN
YOU CAN'T COME!

Apenimon smiles confidently.

APENIMON
I can and I will.

JOHN
If you stand in my way-

APENIMON
I won't. But I will be there.

John watches incredulously as Apenimon saunters away.

APENIMON (CONT'D)
So that I can be there when you
realize the truth. The truth that
what you're looking for is not in
any of those graves.

JOHN
YOU CAN'T COME!

His screams are pointless as Apenimon disappears into the woods. John is left alone trembling with frustration. He turns around to find Peter in the doorway.

EXT. FORD CITY - EARLY MORNING

A fog is cast over the city. John can barely see as he makes his way towards the western woods.

To his dismay he finds Apenimon by the river, patiently waiting atop his horse. He gives John a knowing smile and joins him as he enters the sea of trees.

CUT TO:

EXT. WESTERN WOODS - LATER

The sun is high in the sky, but, beneath the dense cover of trees, the two travelers only see a sprinkling of sunlight.

They ride slowly. Neither one speaks, and, more than likely, neither one has spoken.

Apenimon absorbs the sounds the smells of the forest in autumn. John grips his reins tightly and does everything he can to keep his eyes in front of him. It's all he can do to stay on his horse. This journey is making him sick.

CUT TO:

EXT. WESTERN WOODS - DUSK

The river flows peacefully as day turns to night. The long journey is taking its toll on the two men. Even Apenimon is losing his spark. John bobs with each step.

He turns to Apenimon but instead finds Peter riding in his place. The reins slip through John's hands and he falls to the ground. Infused with fury John leaps up from the ground and charges Apenimon.

JOHN

You wanna' come? You wanna' watch
me dig up you're whole feather-
wearin' family?

Apenimon watches silently as John loses his mind.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Is that it?

He waits for a response that never comes. John goes for the kill.

JOHN (CONT'D)

What do you think you're father
would think of you?

John winces at his own remark. Apenimon remains perfectly calm.

APENIMON

We're close.

He rides on leaving John to compose himself.

CUT TO:

EXT. WESTERN WOODS - CEMETERY - LATER

It's nearly dark. The sun is just high enough in the sky to paint the woods with it's glow.

Apenimon rides quietly in front. John follows close behind, bitterly resolved to complete his mission.

There is a long patch of grass, next to the river, that is illuminated by a rare opening in the trees. Apenimon stops here and gets off his horse. He walks to this small square patch of light and looks up to the sky. John watches from his horse. His hands start to shake.

The two share an interminably long and hard moment. This is it.

John swallows hard. He can't bare to move. Apenimon motions to the hole in the tree cover. John looks up sees the darkening western heavens. Apenimon steps away from the light and welcomes John to take his place.

John nods. He knows what he must do.

John reluctantly gets off his horse and walks slowly to the light. Apenimon watches every movement.

John finally stops. He's reached the halo on the ground. The shovel weighs heavy in his hand. He looks over to Apenimon. He finds him standing next to Peter.

This is too much for John.

JOHN

Go.

Apenimon and Peter shake their heads. John tries to focus his energy on the ground, but he has to look up.

Louder.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Go.

Neither Apenimon or Peter budge. John sees the endless darkness in Peter's eye socket staring back at him unflinchingly.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Go!

The two remain perfectly still. He can't look away from the two of them. His eyes start to well up. He can't bare to have them look at him.

JOHN (CONT'D)

GO!

He screams and raises the shovel over his head. He charges the two of them, but neither one moves. They both stare back at him resolute and unafraid.

He tearfully turns back to the heavenly-light ground and prepares to plunge. He brings the shovel high but he can't bring himself to pierce the ground. He feels Peter and Apenimon watching him. He can't stand it anymore. The spade falls out of his hands. He collapses to the floor and cries.

Peter and Apenimon watch. His journey is over.

EXT. WESTERN WOODS - CEMETERY - NIGHT

John lies motionless under the opening in the tree-cover. His worn face is lit-up by the clear and starry Western night sky. He is weary but relaxed. A new calm has rushed over him. In this moment he is at peace with the natural world.

Apenimon sits a few yards away with his feet soaking in the river. He too seems lost in the night. He quietly watches the flow of the river rush between his toes.

John looks over and sees his travel companion in harmony with the natural world. He sees Peter sitting beside him with his feet in the water.

Peter turns and gives a full smile to his old friend.
Both sides match.

EXT. WESTERN WOODS - CEMETERY - MORNING

The sun shines softly through the trees. Everything is green. Everything is alive. Everything is peaceful.

John carefully absorbs the beauty of these western woods. He breathes in every detail precious. Apenimon sleeps by the river. The spot where Peter sat is now empty. He is gone.

John throws the saddle on his horse. When he turns around he finds Apenimon standing behind him, wearing that same knowing smile.

The two make eye contact. They see each other in a new light.

JOHN
It's very quiet here.

APENIMON
It's always been like that.

John nods and loses himself in reflection.

JOHN
My farm used to be like that. You
could stand in the middle of the
field and hear the wind whistle
through crops miles away.

Apenimon knows the sentiment.

APENIMON

My father said that the natural world is the one thing in this life that is unencumbered by the constraints of time. It is as it always is. You and I both know now that that's hardly the truth.

He looks out across the long expanse of woods. His eyes stop at the river.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

But every now and again, it seems that nothing is truer.

The two share the moment.

APENIMON (CONT'D)

Where will you go?

JOHN

Home. I think. I'll take up Oliver's offer and take the train back to Iowa. Put these old farming hands back to use.

John smiles weakly.

APENIMON

Is that what you want?

John shakes his head.

JOHN

What I want is no longer here.

Apenimon can see the heartbreak.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Apenimon, I...

His voice trails off.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You deserve to be home.

There's nothing left to say. John turns to mount his horse but something stops him...

APENIMON

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, close bosom-friend of the maturing sun.

John can't believe his ears. He turns and sees Apenimon reading from a folded piece of paper.

APENIMON (CONT'D)
Conspiring with him how to load and
bless, with fruit the vines that
round the thatch-eaves run.
To bend with apples the moss'd
cottage-trees, and fill all fruit
with ripeness to the core. To swell
the gourd, and plump the hazel
shells with a sweet kernel; to set
budding more.

CUT TO:

EXT. WESTERN WOODS - EAST - LATER

APENIMON (V.O.)
And still more...

John rides along gleaming river, through the beautifully sunlit woods. The folded page sits in his pocket.

APENIMON (V.O.)
Later flowers for the bees, until
they think warm days will never
cease.

John has found his peace.

APENIMON (V.O.)
For summer has o'er-brimm'd their
clammy cells.

CUT TO:

EXT. WESTERN WOODS - WEST - LATER

Apenimon follows the river in the opposite direction.

APENIMON (V.O.)
Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy
store? Sometimes whoever seeks
abroad may find thee sitting
careless on a granary floor...

He looks around hopefully for a hint that he may be near his tribe.

CUT TO:

EXT. WESTERN WOODS - CEMETERY

John shakes as he desperately fights his mounting emotion. Apenimon smiles and hands him the folded page. John's trembling hand can barely hold it.

APENIMON

I believe this is what you were
looking for.

John musters a nod, but he doesn't dare look down at the page.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORD CITY - LATER

John exits the woods. He sees Ford City with brand new eyes and takes in all of its splendor.

APENIMON (V.O.)

Thy hair soft-lifted by the
winnowing wind or on a half-reap'd
furrow sound asleep, drows'd with
the fume of poppies, while thy hook
spares the next swath and all its
twined flowers...

CUT TO:

EXT. WESTERN WOODS - WEST - LATER

Apenimon stays along the river.

APENIMON (V.O.)

And sometimes like a gleaner thou
dost keep, steady thy laden head
across a brook...

He steps off his horse and looks deep into the current longingly. He still can't seem to find what he's looking for.

APENIMON (V.O.)

Or by a cyder-press, with patient
look, thou watchest the last
oozings hours by hours.

His horse whinnies. He dunks his head in the water and continues on.

APENIMON (V.O.)

Where are the songs of spring? Ay,
where are they?

He looks out. He still has a long trail left to travel.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORD CITY - TRAIN STATION - LATER

With a ticket in hand, John works his way through the throngs of people. He stands in front of the train and looks up in awe. He is still not ready to step on.

APENIMON (V.O.)
Think not of them, thou has they
music too...

He remains still as people pass him by, and remembers the folded page in his pocket.

APENIMON (V.O.)
While barred clouds bloom the soft-
dying day, and touch the stubble-
plains with rosy hue...

He carefully pulls it out. Still, he dares not open it.

CUT TO:

EXT. WESTERN WOODS - WEST - LATER

Apenimon rides slowly onward.

APENIMON (V.O.)
Then in a wailful choir the small
gnats mourn among the river
sallows, borne aloft or sinking as
the light wind lives or dies and
full-grown lambs loud bleat from
hilly bourn.

His horse whinnies again. He can feel her losing strength. The trail continues onward and he is starting to lose faith.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORD CITY - TRAIN STATION - LATER

The train whistle pierces the air and wakes John from his stupor.

APENIMON (V.O.)
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with
treble soft the red-breast whistles
from a garden-croft...

John looks hard down at the folded page. He can't bring himself to open it. He stops a well-dressed young man about to board the train.

JOHN
Excuse me. Will you read this for me?

The man gives him a look like he's crazy.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Please.

He reluctantly takes the paper. John watches patiently.

CUT TO:

EXT. WESTERN WOODS - WEST - LATER

Apenimon walks along the riverside. It is getting dark and his horse is nowhere to be seen.

APENIMON (V.O.)
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

There is still no end in sight.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORD CITY - TRAIN STATION - LATER

As the young man boards the train, John folds the page and returns it to his pocket. The crowd parts and John is left alone on the platform. There's a tear in his eye.

The train blows its final whistle.

THE END

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